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GENTILE BELLINI'S PORTRAIT OF SULTAN MEHMED II



*Lives and Afterlives
of an Iconic Image*

ELIZABETH RODINI

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There is something fatal about a portrait. It has a life of its own.

Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

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Acknowledgments

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Pursuing a Portrait

Subject, Object, Method

Room A

In November 2003, I went to London to see a painting that I had been thinking about for over a decade (Plate 1). It is the work of the Venetian artist Gentile Bellini, produced in 1480 at the Ottoman court in Istanbul, and it depicts Sultan Mehmed II, long known to both Turks and Europeans as “the Conqueror”—a name given out of admiration on the one hand and fear on the other. This disjuncture embodies everything I have come to know about Gentile’s portrait, starting with its reputation. For despite the picture’s fame, I had to travel underground to see it, into the basement of the National Gallery to “Room A of The Lower Floor Collection.” Officially open for only two-and-a-half hours on Wednesday afternoons, this collection was also accessible by special request. I arrived on a Friday and sought out the Duty Manager’s Office, where I was told to come back the next morning for admission.

The geography of the museum should have alerted me that this was a second-rate space for what were considered second-rate paintings. The experience of climbing a grand staircase to reach a collection’s masterworks is familiar to museum-goers worldwide. One virtually never travels down to view a museum’s most precious holdings unless perhaps there is a figurative treasure hunt involved, such as the exploration of an Egyptian “tomb” or a chance to see an archaeological find *in situ*.¹ Located on the Lower Floor of the National Gallery, Room A literalized a sort of class hierarchy that seemed thoroughly and appropriately British. Although the Main Floor galleries were numbered, this one was lettered. Location and lexicon warned me: this is not where you will find our Leonardos and Rembrandts, our Constables and Turners. You are straying off the beaten path if you venture here, into the uncertainties and doubts of art history, where we cannot guarantee the quality of visual experience that is the hallmark of the

National Gallery. Indeed, Room A displayed paintings that museum professionals would call “problem works”: works with significant questions of attribution or even authenticity, works that had at some earlier date been cleaned or restored nearly to the point of defacement, and those that simply did not live up to the considerable standards of the Gallery’s world-class collection.

Gentile Bellini’s *Portrait of Mehmed II* fits that bill, no matter how well known its subject or intriguing its imagery. This is evident as soon as we start to examine the picture closely. It seems at first glance a view in profile—the pose favored for portraits on ancient medals and coins, and preferred well into the mid-fifteenth century (Chapter 2, Figures 2.4 and 2.5)—although, on closer inspection, we can see that the Sultan is actually turned ever so slightly toward us, permitting us to glimpse the bridge of his nose and a bit of his right eye. Recognizing this, we begin to see the third dimension described in the work: furred robes animating the Sultan’s curved shoulders, the bulbous turban wound round his head, and an architectural frame given volume through shading on the inner arch and the adjacent marble ledge. The ledge separates us from Mehmed and is another familiar Renaissance portrait element, used to suggest space by seeming to distance the sitter physically from the viewer. On its base, to left and right, are inscriptions glorifying the subject and the painter—Mehmed is called “conqueror of the world” and Gentile his “golden soldier.” The date of the completion of the painting anchors this timeless representation in a particular moment: 25 November 1480.² A neatly draped tapestry, embroidered and studded with gems, rounds out the pictorial illusion, keeping us back while simultaneously inviting our touch.

The harder we look, the more contradictions emerge, insisting that something about this picture is not quite right. There is the contrast between the crisp details at the margins, of tapestry and carved stone, and the relative illegibility of the sitter himself, his face hazy and his form lost under a bundle of ill-defined robes. Then there is the marble arch that surrounds him. Its role is monumental, yet it seems flimsy, as though one good push could topple it over; it appears to curve up over the Sultan’s head, yet his body remains firmly situated behind it. The overall relationship of figure to architecture is also disconcerting, as if the picture of the Sultan were cut out and pasted behind the carved frame. It is hard to describe or define the space he occupies. Is he sitting before a black background affixed with six crowns? Or is blackness a sign of empty, open space? In that case, do the crowns—themselves enigmatic, possibly emblems of territorial domain, possibly marks of Mehmed’s position in the Ottoman dynasty³—float, like specters or some sort of proto-holographic illusion? How do we explain this lack of clarity from a skilled and much admired Renaissance painter?

One response has been to dismiss the picture as damaged and unfit for close examination. Its condition is poor. It has suffered from overcleaning, aggressive repainting, and other mishandlings. Scholars have a hard time agreeing on what Gentile Bellini painted and whether we can even consider the portrait to be by his hand. It has in past decades been unattributed to Gentile then reattributed to him. It has been considered a copy of Gentile's original as well. Most recent opinion seems settled on its authenticity, although many experts concur that less than 10 percent of what we see can actually be given to Gentile. All of this uncertainty makes people who work with art—scholars, curators, conservators—uncomfortable. To assign a work to an artist and make arguments based on a problematic attribution is risky business if it is going to be reassigned to someone else tomorrow. Similarly, details of appearance, like the kind of visual disjunctures described here, can easily be discounted as irrelevant to the original work.

The problematic reputation of Gentile Bellini's painting certainly disturbs the National Gallery, which in 2009 sent it on long-term loan across town to the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A), where it now hangs, among carpets and metalwork, in a gallery dedicated to cross-cultural exchange in the fifteenth century. In this context, Gentile's journey to the Ottoman court is the dominant concern; the painting's presence has less to do with its essence as a work of art than the larger circumstances that it represents, less for what it is than what it stands for.⁴ Here the paradoxes also multiply: the story of the portrait spans continents but its art historical narrative is restricted by uncertainties over its own past; it is in great demand but is shunned; it is highly relevant but frequently dismissed. The portrait's short journey across London, its resettlement and reassessment at the V&A, are a sharp distillation of a larger, more compelling challenge: how best to tell the story of objects valued for their permanence but defined by change.

Between time and space

When I look at the beleaguered surface of this painting, the aspect that landed it in Room A, I see not a damaged picture but an artifact of survival, and I think of my research as an archaeological project as much as an art historical one. The painting displayed today in London is certainly not the painting that originally was; there is a metaphoric excavation to be undertaken here, allowing that which time has diminished to tell us something of what has been lost—something that, I would venture, was of considerable quality. We allow this with all sorts of

objects: with ancient columns fallen from their plinths, medieval sculptures that have lost their polychromed surface, fragments of pots, and jewelry that can no longer be pieced together. But we demand more of paintings, not permitting the ghosts of images or the reworkings of well-intentioned but ill-informed restorers into our notion of what a painting “is.” With X-rays, ultraviolet imaging, and other modern means, however, we have an excellent sense of Gentile’s original composition that, it turns out, is essentially identical in form to what we see today, down to the inscriptions on the parapet. Arguments about the painting made on the basis of its original composition, on what is represented and how it is arranged, are strongly grounded in visual evidence of authenticity.

A critical loss in the case of the London portrait is its surface, and so the traces of brush and paint that make this a work, quite literally, of Gentile Bellini’s hand. In a world in which authorship is of central importance to the prestige of a picture and to its monetary value, this fact is a significant strike against it. But from the perspective of history writing, we can work around it—even with it, allowing the absence of pigment to redirect our attention and reframe our inquiry. Other paintings by Gentile survive in better condition, so we can begin by imagining that his picture of the Sultan originally exhibited similar qualities of precision and luminosity.⁵ This is a chapter of its physical history that is not difficult to reinvent and suggests that the Sultan portrait, produced, after all, for a high-ranking and certainly demanding patron by one of the most admired Venetian artists of the day, was once of fine quality itself. Rather than the history of a second-rate picture, ours is the story of a fine work that time has transformed.

Indeed, the stripped surface we see in London, flat where modulations of color have been lost and murky where Gentile’s sharp edge of observation has been worn away, tells a different tale, a harder one to trace but ultimately a more captivating one. This is a history not of painter making but of time transmuting, not of a picture hanging on a wall but of a canvas that has journeyed across time and space, from then to now and there to here. Its worn surface is an invitation to ask questions about what happened after the painting was completed. What events have intervened in this picture’s life to make it lose its sheen and sharpness? Where has it hung, who has seen it, and how have they responded? What is the story of the picture beyond the relatively static moment of its production? What happens if we put it back in motion?

Recirculation is the principal project of these pages. By this I intend several things. Most literally, the chapters follow Gentile’s portrait of Mehmed as it traveled from its place of production in Istanbul westward, eventually arriving, although not permanently, in London. There are periods in which we can

pinpoint its place of display and time-stamp its ports of call—on an easel overlooking the Grand Canal in Venice, for example, or in a crate at Victoria Station—each context framing a new set of meanings. For nearly 400 years of its history, however, its location remains a mystery, with only a few tantalizing hints as to where it may have been. In this context, recirculation is also conceptual, referring to the impressions Gentile's picture made not only through its physical presence but also on the imagination.

My pursuit of these varying historical traces grows out of several interlocking areas of interest for art historians and other scholars who write about things: mobility on the one hand, and object biographies on the other. In many ways, Gentile's portrait of Sultan Mehmed exemplifies a history of cross-cultural encounters firmly situated in a "contact zone," a place of convergence that invites diverse modes of inquiries into how and why it was made and used. A long line of distinguished art historians has taken this cosmopolitan approach to the portrait, and their work—singling out that of Gülru Necipoğlu and Julian Raby, to which I am particularly indebted—reveals the complex circumstances of its production. Yet that contact zone, the Ottoman court, represents only a brief chapter in the life story of the portrait. Gentile's canvas has been on the move for half a millennium, its path running the length and breadth of Europe. To echo cultural critic James Clifford, the question that interests me is not so much "Where is it from?" but "Where is it between?"⁶

Quite literally, the "between" is the trajectory spanning the painting's production at the worldly court of the Ottomans and its current home on the walls of the V&A. More abstractly, "between" addresses the meanings it has held along the way, from Mehmed's solicitation to Venice for the loan of a painter to the portrait's enshrinement in art historical narratives as the first realistic representation of a Turk. Attention to the "between" encourages us to build out from more familiar understandings of the picture's history and consider how those other circumstances have informed it. For we moderns, this means releasing the grip that museums have on how we think about old paintings—as stable, static, and subject to neatly crystallized explanations. A mobile object is one that defies such boundaries, be they geographical or interpretive.⁷ Such an object is always in flux.

Thus a focus on mobility goes hand in hand with object biography, the idea that things, including art objects, exist in the world dynamically and in a continual process of evolution. Inspired by the pioneering work of anthropologist Arjun Appadurai and his notion of the social life of things, scholars have adopted this framework to explore and explain the shifting value of objects as they are,

for example, transported, repaired and reworked, housed and displayed, copied, reinterpreted, damaged, denounced—even lost and forgotten.⁸ Again we are pushed between the poles of knowledge, into a place where the certainties of traditional art historical method fall short. I use “life” and “afterlife” to distinguish two interrelated biographical threads: what actually happened to Gentile’s painting, and how it was imagined and remembered in absentia.⁹

I will return to the matter of the afterlife shortly, as it bears heavily on how I use historical evidence and organize my narrative. Yet before we stray too far from the topic of journeys and biographies, it is worth pausing on some terminology. The trajectory of Gentile’s picture and of these pages ranges across territories we know today as Turkey, Italy, and the United Kingdom, Asia, the Middle East, and Europe, but in the period we are discussing none of these political boundaries or regional definitions existed. At the time of the picture’s production, in 1480, Gentile Bellini’s home, Venice, was the seat of a republic that controlled lands across the eastern Mediterranean, and Italy was not even a hint of a dream. Mehmed II ruled the Ottoman Empire, which was rapidly expanding from its Anatolian heartland to encompass territories from the Balkans and the Caucasus to North Africa—far more expansive than the modern Turkish state. No one would have recognized anything called the “Middle East.” To the Venetians it was *Levante*, meaning rising (as of the sun), while to the Ottomans “east” lay across the horizon toward Persia and India. Likewise, the people we call “Europeans” were defined by regional origins (“Venetians”) or given the larger moniker “Franks.”¹⁰ “Turk” was used by Europeans to mean “Muslim” and was a generalized substitute for the derogatory “barbarian,” the converse of a civilized local. Such was also the case with the Ottomans, who tended to group people by religion rather than geography and called the Christian simply “infidel” (*kafir*).¹¹

This terminology is problematic but also eye-opening. It signals, again, the instability of people and places too easily misunderstood as fixed, cueing us as well to the malleable identity of an object like Gentile’s portrait. It also reminds us that the way we talk about people and things contributes mightily to how we understand them. I employ in these pages a balance of terms that strives to be meaningful to modern readers while remaining sensitive to historical language, moderating usage as we move from the fifteenth century to the present: so I use Venetian in 1500, Italian in 1900; Ottoman in 1600, Turkish in 2000; and for clarity generally Constantinople before the Ottoman conquest of 1453 and Istanbul after, although the historic city name held on for centuries.¹² Europe and Italy are useful labels even when anachronistic, and Turk helpfully indicates the people of a region without reference to politics until the rise of the modern

Turkish state. I avoid the label Middle East except when a twenty-first-century clarification is needed, and when ancient history is at the fore I refer to Mesopotamia and Assyria. The most fraught moniker, “Oriental,” demands its own investigation, which I pursue in Chapter 5 in the larger context of nineteenth-century Orientalism.

“Portrait” is another term that requires explication, although it is so thoroughly the topic of these pages that we will keep this opening discussion brief. The portrait will be our concern at every turn, from the language used to talk about it in the fifteenth century to debates enfolded in the twentieth.¹³ Yet its centrality to this story compels us to consider for a moment how we think about portraiture today. A portrait is typically defined as a likeness, a representation of a particular person that looks sufficiently like that person to serve as a tool of physical identification. It does not require much effort to discover that this is far too simple a definition: take cubist portraiture by Picasso, intentionally deceptive self-portraits by Cindy Sherman and Adrian Piper, or even the very basic notion that a camera can lie. We will return to this problematic equation, portrait equals likeness, in many contexts and guises across 500 years and have a chance to set our own notions against historic ones. So too will we need to rethink the contemporary understanding of portraiture as a representation of an inward, personal state of being. Greatly admired portraitists, from Titian to Rembrandt to Van Gogh, are consistently praised for their ability to depict this unseen essence in paint. However, in Gentile Bellini’s day and in the context of courtly commissions like that of Mehmed II, portraiture was valued above all as a vehicle for outward expression, a means of presenting the public self to audiences near and far.

My title describes Gentile’s painting as “iconic,” by which I mean to refer to its ongoing fame, across the centuries and particularly in modern-day Turkey—something we will attend to in the final chapter. In the context of likeness and related matters of representation, however, this term also invites attention. Orthodox Christianity (centered for centuries in Constantinople, Mehmed’s eventual capital) and art historians who study such matters define the icon as an image that transmits a sacred presence, typically of the Virgin Mary or Christ.¹⁴ Icons are generally paintings and can sometimes resemble portraits, although their status and use are completely different from the genre of imagery discussed in these pages. They not only depict people but are also treated as surrogates for them, worshipped by the faithful who believe they are a direct transmission, through association and copy, of their sacred subjects. An icon’s authenticity depends on the conviction that “the painter had recorded the actual living

model,” or that there was a direct link between the model and that painter’s original picture through an interconnected set of copies.¹⁵ A similar chain of representation will guide our pursuit of Gentile’s picture in the sixteenth century. Orthodox icons also invite us to pause, again, on the notion of likeness, as the “truth” of these images lies not in their physical resemblance to, say, the face of Christ but in a physical and ritual association with him. Mehmed, enthroned at the heart of Byzantium and a broadly educated, intensely inquisitive man, surely understood icons and their power, just as he was patronizing emerging forms of Italian portraiture.¹⁶ Did he imagine some possible overlap in their aura or potential? We need not equate our categorizations—icon versus portrait—with his; rather, confluences of form, function, and meaning point to the very complexities that concern us here.

As we follow the trail of Gentile’s portrait, we will find that the expectations for what portraits can be and should do are much more varied than what likeness and interiority can encompass. We will think about this portrait as a transaction between sitter and artist and as a medium of exchange. We will imagine it as the test of the painter’s skill and a spur to memory, as a source of information and of political posturing, and—recognizing and querying widespread assumptions about the status of representational imagery in Muslim cultures—as a dangerous thing, best discarded. We will compare the importance of its subject, the Sultan, to the status of the portrait itself, and tap into shifts in this balance that impact how it has been valued. The London portrait is also a vehicle for thinking about relationships, between artist and subject and among those who came later, including scholars, collectors, institutions, and even nations. People will bob in and out of our story, but the anchor that holds the narrative in line is the portrait—sometimes its physical presence but more often ideas about it, what it represented to those people and how they have continued to reimagine it. My real subject is the stories that orbit this peripatetic image as it has traveled, over time and sometimes unrecognized, between Istanbul and London.

Stories and quests

I am one of the storytellers. This may not seem the language of a historian, but it is accurate in several senses. The more academic of these stems from my own immersion as a student in the 1980s and 1990s in what is best characterized as “new historicism.” So dubbed by Stephen Greenblatt in what he describes as a spontaneous attempt at naming, new historicism is an approach to the past that

is fundamentally cross-disciplinary, interconnected, and self-aware.¹⁷ It owes a particular debt to anthropology, from which it derives the notion of a “thick” context of meaning; and it draws on post-modern literary theory, including the conviction that any form of writing is a representation rather than a reflection of reality—this goes for the writing of the critic as well.¹⁸ The seminal work of Michel Foucault undergirds new historicism. In particular, Foucault insisted on the conditional nature of both historical evidence and history making, daringly likening his own texts to fiction.¹⁹

The landscape for historians inspired by this critical mode is challenging but, like a strenuous mountain hike, highly rewarding. History writing has long relied on empirical language to convey its basis in fact, language that the influential historiographer Hayden White associates with the nineteenth-century novel and such conventions as linear chronology, unified point of view, and a distant, omniscient narrator.²⁰ White is skeptical of texts that hide the fact of history making under a veneer of neutrality in pursuit of an “explanatory effect,” and he proposes alternative forms of writing history that might be “impressionistic, expressionistic, [or] surrealistic.”²¹ A “poetic” history that admits of its own art and perspectives has, for White, the creative potential to break new ground and expand our understanding.²²

The risks of such an approach may seem tremendous: if we replace neutrality with subjectivity and explanation with poetics, are we not implying that fiction can replace fact? Not at all. Even at the moment that history “happens,” its meaning is varied according to the many who intersect with it—varied, thus multidimensional and unfixed. To accept that there is no single take on any one event (or document or painting) is not to deny its essence, but to acknowledge its complexity. New historicists tackle this challenge by searching for their subject in the thicket of the life that has surrounded it, allowing the authoritative source to mingle with the anecdotal, the solidly steadfast with the small detail and the contradiction. Such histories do not claim to spotlight the truth but see their work as akin to a prism, refracting the past in a rich spectrum of meaning.

Because of its mobile, evolving history, Gentile’s portrait of Mehmed II virtually demands to have its story told in multiple. Beyond its literal trajectory, there is also the course of memory and invention, of what people think they know and remember of the image—of the life the picture takes on beyond the frame. We first meet it at the Ottoman court in Istanbul where it was produced, but will track it soon after to Venice (perhaps—this is a story of remembering and forgetting) and later to Britain in the context of nineteenth-century Orientalism and collection building. We find it again in Venice on the brink of

World War I, in early struggles over Italian patrimony, and at the National Gallery, in a tangle over the practices of preservation and the legal definitions of portraiture. Its trail leads us across London and finally, in 1999, back to Istanbul, where it stirs up a dynamic brew of historic regret and national pride.

As an art historian, I am not only writing about this afterlife but extending it. In the pages that follow, I use the portrait as a tool for exploring a range of questions critical to the history of art that I hope will interest experts and amateurs alike: questions of meaning in circulation (Chapter 2), truth in representation (Chapter 3), copies and memory (Chapter 4), Self and Other (Chapter 5), authenticity (Chapter 6), patrimony (Chapter 7), “portraiture” (Chapter 8), and contemporary relevance (Chapter 9). Another goal is to explore possible approaches to an object forged in a cultural contact zone but circulating out in the world, thus addressing the current challenge to write a more global art history—a point I return to below. In the spirit of new historicism, my attention to one painting might be considered an extended historical anecdote, a small detail that reveals a world of thinking.²³

This detail, Gentile’s portrait of Mehmed, presents significant challenges to history writing for reasons we have already begun to acknowledge. The painting itself is in a questionable state. Similarly, documents from the painter’s stay in Istanbul are sparse and difficult to verify, and gaps in its provenance (that is, when it was to be found where) are substantial. Yet evidence for the picture’s history, if generously defined and creatively examined, is wide-ranging and provocative. We must be willing to leave the actual canvas behind and attend instead to its residue in memory, in copies, tributes, reconstructions, and even rumors. In some cases, this context is all we have, and we must work from that frame inward, seeking a trace of the picture in the matters that surrounded it. Traditional histories might struggle with this distance from the subject and be silenced by the materials—documents and pigment—that have been lost. But by embracing even the more oblique stories, what is known about this portrait along with what has been believed, imagined, and invented, we can arrive at a fuller sense of both its life and its afterlife.²⁴

Thus we return to stories. A “story,” too, seems to imply a fiction or an untruth, but I use the term here to underscore the fact that I—like any historian, and with particular gratitude to those whom I emulate²⁵—am working between my own time and circumstances and those of my subject. History is made, not found, and it is helpful to use language that acknowledges that act of construction. I therefore write in my own voice when personal experience imposes significantly on the narrative—primarily in the opening and closing chapters, but not exclusively. I

occasionally use contemporary analogies to bridge past and present. And because I aim to make this history accessible, I frame my engagement with the many scholars, thinkers, and sources that support this text in ways I hope will be inviting rather than discouraging. For those who want to trace my intellectual path, there are the Notes and Bibliography to mark the way; others are welcome to proceed without them.

Globalism and relevance

Storytelling is an apt description of my work for another reason, and that is that my quest after Gentile's portrait has become quite personal. Fifteen years after meeting it in Room A, I am still thinking about it. It has crept so thoroughly into my imagination that, as I recount in the final chapter of this book, I arrived in Istanbul in 2018 with distorted expectations of the traces I would find of it there. My own fascination with the portrait begs that I take a hard, inward look at the theme underlying that chapter, namely the matter of relevance. It is not that this painting is particularly important in the history of art; its time on the Lower Level of the National Gallery makes that abundantly clear. So why have I come to care so much about Gentile's picture and its history?

Old pictures—"Old Masters," as they are often and unfortunately labeled—do not have much of a reputation for intrigue today. The ever-shifting novelty of contemporary art and a comprehensible disaffection for histories of "dead white guys" makes my subject seem outdated, distant from the things that matter. In fact the opposite is the case, precisely because Gentile's portrait of Mehmed has existed and still exists not just as a canvas but as an idea, one in dialogue with a varied and increasingly global social context.

I have not to this point made much of the East–West theme that underlies these pages, from the diplomatic exchange at the heart of the story to the complicated relationships that define modern geopolitics—although this is likely the most obvious point of relevance to many readers. Some might see a fifteenth-century Venetian painting of an Ottoman sultan as an optimistic symbol of harmony; others might interpret its production as a lost moment of promise, a failure of historic rivals to compromise and come together, or as just another node in an ever-evolving network of cross-cultural interactions, at times tranquil but often not. The portrait is a touchstone for historians interested in matters of exchange and encounter;²⁶ yet new approaches to globalism invite new takes on it as well.

A twenty-first-century cosmopolitan art history resists the traditional map of the world that relies on fixed boundaries and nationalist frames to define our subjects—Turkish sultans, Italian painters, British collectors, and so forth.²⁷ This revised outlook, with its postcolonial foundations, prioritizes dynamism and change.²⁸ It sees the world as fluid, a place where objects move and morph, defying geopolitical borders and classifications and demanding new lines of questioning.²⁹ In this view, notions of stylistic influence are too linear, borrowing too hierarchical, and translation often too contrived. Culture is inherently “between” and entangled. Inspired by scholars who have sought to disrupt the oppositional division between East and West, I too aim to write against this binary frame.³⁰ Venice and Istanbul may be understood as poles in the story of a journey, but more apt is the motif of circulation that is embodied by the London portrait itself, ongoing and never complete. The fact that the portrait returned briefly to Turkey in 1999 makes the circle a better figure for my project than either the line or the arrow.

Nor can any of us escape our own historical moment and our own frames of reference. One day, in February 2015, in the Rare Book Room of the Johns Hopkins University Library in Baltimore, I sat down to finish my study of *Nineveh and Its Remains* by Austen Henry Layard, the first known owner of Gentile's portrait in the modern era. As we will see, Layard was among other things an explorer and the archaeologist who excavated the ancient Mesopotamian city of Nineveh in the 1840s, in what was then Ottoman territory. He was responsible for bringing many Assyrian antiquities back to London, including a giant winged bull now in the British Museum (Chapter 5, Figure 5.5). He was also an amateur ethnographer, peppering his treatise with observations about the people he encountered on his travels; *Nineveh and Its Remains* is as much a description of the land's modern residents as of its ancient ruins.

As I read, my own sense of time and space was upended. The bull in London closely resembled the creature I had seen that very morning on the front page of the newspaper, being defaced by a militant of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) wielding a power tool.³¹ This act of destruction reverberated through my reading of Layard. His book describes how the *ulema* (Muslim scholars) “pronounced that [excavated Assyrian] figures were the idols of the infidels,” and how the local people, “like obedient disciples, so completely destroyed them, that [the British archaeologist] was unable to obtain even a fragment.” “May God curse all infidels and their works!” declares another tribal leader.³² Layard's delight at receiving permits to export his Assyrian finds to England suddenly seemed less smug to me. I could see through his imperialist satisfaction to my own disconcerting

sense of relief that, as a result of his efforts, some of those treasures were far away from the weapons of that morning's terrorists, deep inside a London museum.³³

I was trying to work as a historian, to put on my blinders and not read a 150-year-old text through the news of that morning and my emotions. But it was an impossible task. I could not look at the images in Layard's volume or read his words without conjuring up the violence unfolding, against objects but more importantly people, in territory once Assyrian, later Ottoman and Iraqi, and at that moment held by ISIS. It seemed as though history was rolling up on itself, tightening a knot around my research that made it more uncomfortable but also, I came to realize, more relevant. This coincidence of word and image, of events past and present, forced me to collapse the space of history and address head-on the meaning of objects in the present. I was able to see, in that confluence, the way that the winged bull—carved in Assyria, buried by time, excavated and shipped to London, published by Layard, and visited by millions at the British Museum, but also, in its close cousin, assaulted by the weapons of ISIS—was both a sign of the past and an indicator of the present, highly significant despite its distant history. Relevance is not forever, it comes and goes. In February 2015, an ancient Assyrian bull was briefly at the center of the world.

This detour through my reading of Layard's text is apt for another reason beyond the matter of relevance: it takes me away from Gentile's picture, yet the picture is still there, if at some remove, as an artwork that Layard owned and treasured. We will cycle toward and away from the material subject of this book, the portrait of Sultan Mehmed II, many times over the course of the coming chapters. These narrative byways are central to my larger theme and illustrate another point, namely that any single object, if thoroughly pursued, leads in myriad directions. Our approach to Gentile's portrait of Mehmed may at times feel disrupted, for there will be many twists and turns along the way. But this disjuncture is in keeping with the nature of the picture itself, with its inherent contradictions and its ongoing, persistent intrigue. Our focus in the eight chapters that follow is not just the canvas in the frame, but the people, ideas, and events that have encompassed it. In the end, this book is about journeys—of the painting, and of our own roads to understanding it.

In Circulation

Courtly Exchange and the Discourse of Objects

On 18 May 1479, in the Sala del Collegio of the Ducal Palace in Venice, a group of Ottoman ambassadors presented Doge Giovanni Mocenigo with a “delicate scarf” (*fazzuol sotil*) that had once been worn by Sultan Mehmed II.¹ The Doge, as the leader of the Venetian Republic—and one who had recently gone into battle against Mehmed’s forces—was asked to don the scarf himself, “in a sign of tight, secure friendship.” Scarves frequently gird the waists of sultans in Ottoman portraits and were often held by them, as in a picture of Mehmed II smelling a rose that is attributed to Şiblizade Ahmed (Figure 2.1). The Sultan’s gift to the Doge was thus both political and personal, an element of official dress that was worn close to the royal body of the ruler. Presumably the Doge acquiesced to the Sultan’s sartorial request and donned the proffered scarf, for soon after, the diplomats sat down to business.²

Their encounters were recorded by Domenico Malipiero, a member of the Venetian Senate who for over forty years kept detailed notes of the activities of the republic’s ruling body.³ Venice had been at war on and off with Mehmed for decades, but in a moment of relative tranquility the Sultan had sent his ambassadors to exchange an oath of peace with the Venetians, and to make a few requests of them as well. Malipiero identifies the principal envoy as *un zudio*, a Jew: Jews often played diplomatic roles in this period, particularly as translators and interpreters because of linguistic skills honed over centuries of exile and dispersion. The envoy presented a letter from the Sultan requesting the services of “un bon depentor che sapia retrazer,” that is, “a good painter who knows how to make portraits” (we will return to a fuller interpretation of the word *retrazer*, or *ritrarre* in modern Italian, in the next chapter).

The Senate selected Gentile Bellini for the job, agreed to pay for his travel, and dispatched him promptly on 3 September of the same year.⁴ This was a notable gesture of goodwill as Gentile was considered the best in the business, a portraitist so skilled that his many commissions included several pictures of Doge



Figure 2.1 Attributed to Şiblizade Ahmed, *Sultan Mehmed II Smelling a Rose*, c. 1480–1, watercolor on paper, TSMK. H.2153, fol.10a, Topkapı Palace Museum, Istanbul.



Figure 2.2 Gentile Bellini, *Doge Giovanni Mocenigo*, c. 1478, tempera on panel, Venice, Museo Correr, Alinari / Art Resource, N. Y.⁵

Mocenigo himself, produced both before and after his trip east (Figure 2.2). Gentile's travels to the Ottoman court were nothing less than a diplomatic gift from one of the Mediterranean's greatest, if weakening, powers to one of the emerging forces in the region.

Other sorts of gifts populate this chapter, including medals, books, maps, and one remarkable album that Gentile himself presented to the Sultan. Now in the Louvre, the album contains drawings by Gentile's father Jacopo, and was the offering of an ambitious artist to an engaged, highly curious patron (Figure 2.7). We can study its images as a key to Jacopo's work, and even to that of Gentile. Yet envisioning these two men, artist and patron, seated together before the album proposes a different sort of historical exercise. It prioritizes the object as intermediary, and makes discourse—the exchange of ideas about it, the back and forth—central to its meaning.⁶ From this perspective, the album is a stand-in for my larger investigation of Gentile's portrait. Before we can follow it through the gates of the Topkapı Palace and sit down with its interlocutors, however, we must learn more about the sultan who sparked this remarkable encounter.

Mehmed II as potentate and patron

When the Venetians thought of Mehmed, they thought not of art but of war. His capture of Constantinople at age 21 earned him the sobriquet “Conqueror”—*Fatih* in his native language—a name resonant with as much pride for the Ottomans as fear for the residents of Europe (it is still how he is referred to in Turkish). This was a monumental victory. Named for Constantine, the first Christian emperor of Rome, Constantinople occupied a strategic location on the heavily trafficked straits between Europe and Asia (Figure 2.3). Since 330 CE, it had been the seat of an empire, first of Rome and soon after of Byzantium as Roman power waned. Although they self-identified as the heirs of Rome, the Byzantines were political and religious rivals to the Catholic Latin West for a thousand years.⁷ Yet their defeat came at the hands of the Ottomans. On 29 May 1453, after intense strategizing, significant technological investment, several attempted assaults, and a lengthy siege, Sultan Mehmed breached the famously impregnable walls of the city and claimed it as his own.

At least the Byzantines were Christians, if of the Orthodox persuasion. The fact that the Ottomans were Muslim, with an expansionist military philosophy, frightened European states both large and small.⁸ In the years after 1453, Mehmed took Serbia, marched to Belgrade, and attacked Venetian outposts in

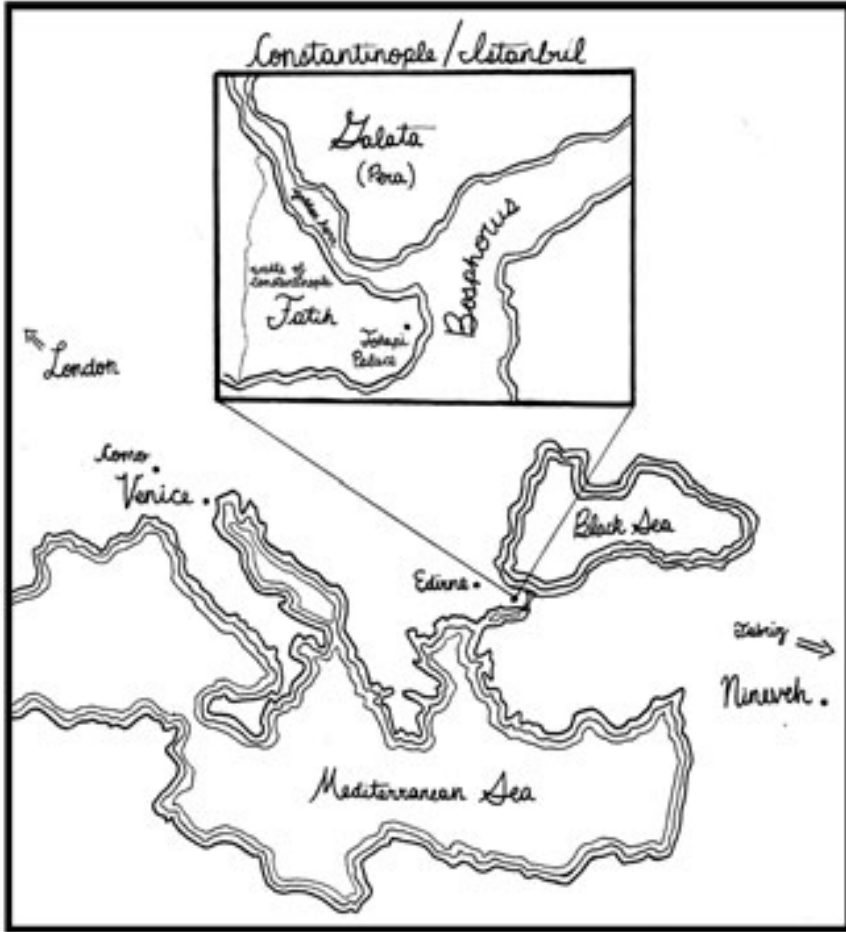


Figure 2.3 Map of the Mediterranean and Constantinople/Istanbul, c. 1480.
© Natalie Rudin.

the Aegean and Adriatic Seas. One story held that he planned to cap off his seemingly inevitable invasion of Italy by building a bridge between Marghera, on the mainland, and the island city of Venice, allowing his troops to march right in—Venetian defenses were not walls but waterways, useless in the face of a mighty bridge.⁹ As outlandish as it sounds, the rumor points to another well-known aspect of Mehmed's character, namely his avid pursuit of technological novelty. Indeed, the twinning of war and peace, of belligerence and art, was expected and admired in Renaissance Europe, where the figure of the warrior

prince was held in high esteem. Mehmed's petition to the Venetian Senate that resulted in Gentile Bellini's voyage to Istanbul was part of that package.¹⁰

Although this is the most famous of the Sultan's requests for the services of an Italian artist, it was neither the only one nor the first.¹¹ This sort of exchange—an early form of cultural diplomacy—was a growing phenomenon in Europe and Asia and had significant impact on artistic forms and styles. As early as 1461, Mehmed began soliciting Italian rulers for the loan of artists, particularly painters and bronze workers.¹² In that year, he requested the services of Matteo de' Pasti, artist and court intimate of Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta, lord of the Italian city-state of Rimini. Matteo's greatest talent lay in the art of the cast bronze portrait medal, a classical form that was reborn and thriving in Italy in the mid-fifteenth century. Produced in multiple copies and widely circulated, medals—such as that designed by Matteo to celebrate the military victories and artistic patronage of Sigismondo (Figure 2.4)—were powerful forms of propaganda, often arriving as diplomatic gifts to places like the Ottoman court. Mehmed's introduction to Italian art likely came through medals, and quite possibly through the work of Matteo himself.¹³

Matteo left for Istanbul in October 1461, bearing gifts and an effusive letter of introduction in which Sigismondo praised him as both a skilled artist and a fine companion.¹⁴ But Matteo only got as far as the island of Crete, then under the control of Venice, where he was arrested by Venetian officials who accused him



Figure 2.4 Matteo de' Pasti, *Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta*, 1446, bronze, Samuel H. Kress Collection, 1957.14.652.a. Courtesy of the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

of espionage. The accusation was rooted in a complicated set of facts, concerns, and circumstantial evidence. Sigismondo's position as a mercenary warlord, or military leader-for-hire, meant that his loyalties on the battlefield were directly tied to salary, although even in that inherently capricious profession his reputation as an ally was less than sterling. Most notoriously, he had disregarded terms for peace set by Pope Pius II, resulting in further war, excommunication, and, in 1462, the unprecedented punishment of canonization in Hell.¹⁵ Two years later, and only three years after sending Matteo east to the Ottoman court, Sigismondo sold his services to Venice in its war against the Turks in southern Greece.

At the time of Matteo's arrest by the Venetians, he was carrying several gifts, including a manuscript copy of Roberto Valturio's *On Military Matters*, which contained technical diagrams of war machines attributed to Matteo and possibly one or more maps of Italy and the Adriatic.¹⁶ These were fitting diplomatic offerings and items of mutual interest to two leaders involved simultaneously in acts of war and artistic patronage.¹⁷ But for the Venetians, suspicious of both rulers, these materials further provoked their mistrust: what sort of secrets or plans might these maps harbor? Might Sigismondo—weak, but potentially well informed and certainly unreliable—be able to provide critical tactical information to the powerful Ottoman forces? Mehmed and his armies were continuing to press west, in nearly constant skirmishes and outright confrontations with the Venetians (the Veneto-Ottoman war lasted for well over a decade, officially from 1463 to 1479). Venice opted to take no chances and ended Matteo's mission by confiscating the sensitive gifts and sending him back to Rimini.¹⁸

A more benign view of Sigismondo's offerings suggests that Mehmed, like many of his contemporaries in Italy, had a range of interests, from military tactics to geography and mapping to portraiture, and that these were supported in the form of gifts by those seeking his favor. It is easy to label Mehmed as the Ottoman answer to the West's "Renaissance man." Yet the royal practice of broad cultural patronage and recruiting external talent was hardly unique to Europe. Two great Islamic empires, the Timurid before Mehmed and the Safavid that came shortly after, gathered the best artists together in their capitals to ornament palaces, illuminate books, and fashion beautiful objects from metal, ceramic, and silk.¹⁹ Like Mehmed and the Ottomans, they had large expanses of territory from which to draw talent, and unified courts where they could distill it into a distinctive yet cosmopolitan style.²⁰ Sultan Mehmed recognized these advantages and seized on them. In the mid-1470s, following his defeat of the Timurids, for example, he brought Persian artisans to Istanbul to work in the court atelier.

Their influence is visible in the floral motifs that characterize the Ottoman ceramics and textiles of this period.²¹

War, ironically, can be fertile ground for creativity, and Mehmed kept an eye trained across the battlefields toward all manner of innovations, from near and far. He was interested in crystal lenses, chiming clocks, and fine weaponry from Venice and its colonies.²² Also looking to Italy, he commissioned the star-shaped Yedikule Fortress to guard the southern shore of Istanbul. Considered impermeable, Yedikule even housed a branch of the Royal Treasury.²³ Mehmed's interest in its innovative form probably came from the work of the Italian architectural theorist Filarete and possibly that of Leon Battista Alberti, who wrote an influential treatise on painting to which we will return.²⁴ Although Filarete's text was widely known and read in Italy, Mehmed was the first ruler to actually realize one of his pioneering designs.²⁵

Mehmed's turn to the west also reached back chronologically, to the classical past of ancient Greece and Rome.²⁶ Much of this interest had to do with terrain: the region where he grew up, around the then capital of Edirne on the western edge of the Ottoman Empire (Figure 2.3), was rich with archaeological remains, including coins and medals, that attested to a complex and variegated cultural history.²⁷ As Mehmed pushed his empire westward, his own territories encroached ever further onto this layered landscape. Of course, Constantinople had until 1453 been the seat of Byzantium itself. Its material fabric and the people that filled its streets were vibrant evidence of an ongoing interconnectedness between East and West, between the past and its recollection in the present.

After its conquest by Mehmed, the capital remained a cosmopolitan city on a significant scale.²⁸ It was home to various religious communities (Jews, Latin and Orthodox Christians, and Muslims lived in relative harmony, if not perfect equity) and continued to support a vibrant "Latin" (Western European) merchant district that included many Venetians, although their numbers waxed and waned as Venice fell in and out of favor.²⁹ Ambassadors and their retinue were joined by merchants, pilgrims, and a supporting cast of characters—soldiers, sailors, physicians, artisans, laborers—who continuously traversed the city, carrying with them all manner of experiences, ideas, and objects. In this context, Mehmed had ready access to Western art, at least in its most portable, available forms.

Among these were bronze medals of the type produced by Matteo de' Pasti for Sigismondo Malatesta. Mehmed almost certainly knew Pisanello's portrait medal of 1438, the first Renaissance example of an ancient genre, made to commemorate the visit of Emperor John VIII Palaeologus to Italy (Figure 2.5).³⁰ The penultimate ruler of Byzantium, John had traveled to Florence and Ferrara



Figure 2.5 Pisanello, *John VIII Palaeologus, Emperor of Byzantium*, c. 1438–42, bronze, London. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

to attend the Council of the Union of Churches (1438–9), with the aim of obtaining western assistance against the gathering threat of the Turks. The overall goal of the Council—to unite the Latin and Greek Orthodox churches in a force strong enough to restore Christian dominance across the eastern Mediterranean—was of tremendous consequence to the Ottomans and must have resonated for Mehmed in his continuing territorial struggles to the west. He likely appreciated, and possibly emulated, the themes of movement and circulation in Pisanello's medal, from the vignette of the journey, to the motivations for its production, to the genre of the medal itself (Figure 2.9).

Another introduction to Western art came through printed imagery, including engraving, which was in its infancy in the mid-fifteenth century. It is hard for us, in the age of digital reproduction and electronic script, to imagine the wonder provoked by an exactly repeatable image of a fine, pen-like quality. The Sultan—surely struck by both the aesthetics of the medium as well as its technological innovation—acquired a small collection of Western prints, probably through Florentine merchants resident in Istanbul.³¹ Mehmed himself did not patronize printmaking, nor did he harness the strategic and propagandistic potential of a repeatable image—a somewhat ironic fact, given how eagerly print was taken up in Europe to demonize the Turks.³² In 1600, the Venetian chronicler Francesco Sansovino compounded the countless printed slurs against them by claiming that the Turks denounced printing as a sin only because they were unable to manage a press.³³

In a similarly derogatory vein is a hand-colored engraving of around 1470 labeled “El Gran Turco”—none other than Mehmed himself—that survives in the Topkapı Palace Museum Library, likely part of the same Florentine acquisition (Plate 2). It is quite faded, but comparison with another impression of the same work, now in Berlin, permits us to make out its finer details (Figure 2.6). The



Figure 2.6 Master of the Vienna Passion (attributed), *El Gran Turco*, c. 1470, engraving, 140–1879, bpk Bildagentur / Kupferstichkabinett, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin / Joerg P. Anders / Art Resource, N. Y. (Also see Plate 2.)

“Great Turk” sits proudly upright and gazes straight ahead, a noble figure, yet one tainted by toxic references: in the contemporary visual language of the West, a sharp nose and pointed beard marked both Jews and demons. Extravagantly patterned robes and a headdress topped with a spitting dragon, like a menacing version of the hat worn by the Byzantine Emperor on Pisanello’s medal (Figure 2.5), suggest a sort of anti-priest.³⁴ Even the label is derogatory, replacing Mehmed’s many titles with the generalized identifier “Turk,” a term Mehmed reviled: he reportedly threatened death to anyone who used it in reference to him in Venice (Gentile, by contrast, flattered the Sultan by folding his many titles into a lengthy painted inscription).³⁵ How might Mehmed have

interpreted this printed image, his copy tinted rather scandalously at the lips, and why did he opt to preserve it? Most likely it was saved by the technology of print itself, of being able to duplicate an image over and over, with paper, ink, and a press—the wonder of a mechanically reproducible portrait.

“Technology” and “art,” as these terms are commonly used today, tend to rest in opposition. In fact their etymology reveals a close relationship: *techne* is Greek for skill or making rooted in cognition; the Latin is *ars*. In Ottoman Turkish, the kindred term was *şan'at*, which from the late fifteenth century also introduced a recognition of creative expression.³⁶ In Italy, the most revolutionary artistic technologies of the period included a codification of linear perspective and an interpretation of the human form increasingly based on anatomical study. At the heart of both these novelties was a growing sense that observation of the physical world was the origin of representation, and an understanding that one goal of art making, particularly painting, was to capture the visual world as it appears to the human eye. To put it more concisely, many innovative artists and patrons were intensely interested in the powers of naturalism. This particular novelty, along with some of the debates it provokes, will occupy us in the next chapter. How knowledge of such innovations traveled, however, is central to our present concerns.

An artist and an album at court

The drawing album gifted to Mehmed by Gentile offered the Sultan a wide and generous gateway to contemporary Italian art. Its author, Jacopo Bellini, was a renowned painter and father of the fifteenth-century Venetian manner, both figuratively and literally: in addition to his two sons, Gentile and Giovanni, his son-in-law Andrea Mantegna was a disciple. Jacopo's album survives virtually intact in Paris, something of a miracle given the path it must have traveled to get there, having once belonged to Louis XV of France and ending up in 1884 at the Louvre.³⁷ The drawings within are neatly finished works on vellum that display an astonishing range of artistic inventions. Intended by Jacopo as a tool for study and teaching, the album can be considered a panoramic guide to the interests of mid-fifteenth-century Italian artists, including antiquity and anatomy, and landscapes populated with all manner of beasts, both actual and imagined.

Among Jacopo's most persistent concerns was the creation of a clearly articulated architectural space using the technical devices of perspective. One drawing shows the head of an executed man, presumably John the Baptist, being

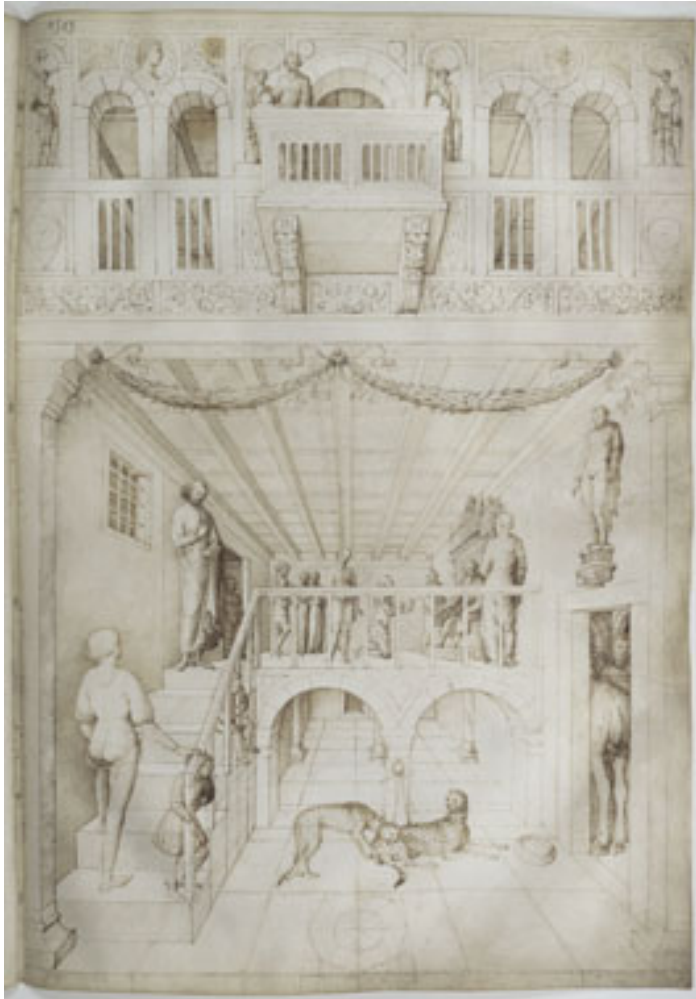


Figure 2.7 Jacopo Bellini, *Interior of a Palace with Presentation of the Head of an Executed Man*, mid-fifteenth century, pen and brown ink on vellum, Louvre, Paris.
© RMN-Grand Palais / Art Resource, N.Y.

presented on a platter to an enthroned ruler (Figure 2.7). Despite many tantalizing details, a careful demarcation of the setting through measured lines is primary. We see the royal chamber as though we were floating before it, close enough to observe floor and ceiling, both gridded for visual clarity. Bodies are secondary, placed there like afterthoughts to the more central exercise of perspective. Demarcations on the floors can be seen running through the chained leopards, for example, and the figures leaning over the staircase are transparent, their bodies revealing the form of the building beneath them.

Jacopo's images are both experimental and instructional, serving as places to work out a problem and transmit successful solutions. Fundamentally, they are tools of the artist's trade. In this particular case, subject matter was not incidental: the depiction of beheadings was also a topic of discussion for Mehmed and Gentile—but more of that later.

Although Jacopo's sketchbook was a personal gift to the Sultan, Gentile's own arrival at the Topkapı Palace in the early fall of 1479 was an official occasion organized through the intricacies of Ottoman protocol.³⁸ Palace architecture reinforced ceremonial practices that communicated rank, status, tradition, and ambition.³⁹ Mehmed built the Topkapı, known by the Ottomans until the nineteenth century as the New Imperial Palace, in Istanbul shortly after his conquest of the city in 1453. Its entrance was aligned with the great church-turned-mosque, Hagia Sophia, and its expansive walls encompassed a functioning city in miniature, while its gardens spread out above the scenic waters of the Bosphorus. A sequence of three vast courtyards linked by massive gates defined levels of privilege and exclusion, progressively filtering out visitors and attendants: from the practical services of the first court (large enough to accommodate grand processions), to the administrative spaces of the second, and into the private spheres of the third, inner sanctum. There Mehmed lived with his household, close attendants, members of the Palace School that trained young pages for future administrative careers, and the women of the harem. Within these spaces, balconies, loggias, windows, and architectural screens controlled visual access to the Sultan, which was available to only a chosen few. In the dialogue between public and private, portraits had a part to play as well.

Few people had the opportunity to share a space with Mehmed or interact with him personally. Most diplomatic exchanges took place in the Chamber of Petitions, a kiosk just inside the third court, where the Sultan, posed cross-legged on a dais draped with textiles, exchanged ritual greetings with visiting ambassadors. From behind a screened window above the atrium, he oversaw the presentation of gifts. Visitors could barely make out his regal silhouette, although the Sultan himself had a fine perspective over the parade of offerings: the Venetians favored bolts and garments of richly piled velvets,⁴⁰ but rarer tributes also appeared, such as reading glasses and cheese⁴¹ and on occasion even a portrait. In 1492, the Mantuan ambassador described the procession of a picture of his sovereign, Francesco Gonzaga, for Mehmed's son and heir Bayezid II.⁴² If Jacopo's drawing book was presented here, Mehmed saw it, but from a distance. Only later would he have had the leisure to linger over it, study its pages, and—we can readily imagine—talk about it with Gentile. For a man engaged with the latest developments in

Italian art, few things could have been more intriguing than a set of drawings that literally sketched them out and a painter with whom to discuss them.

Conversations such as this one took place in the seclusion of the third court, in spaces like the Treasury and the Privy Chambers, Mehmed's private quarters where valuables were stored. Gentile's work for Mehmed makes it clear that he was a rare visitor who was permitted insider access and close, direct contact with the Sultan. This is confirmed by snippets in the writings of Giovanni Maria Angiolello, native to Vincenza (near Venice) and resident at the Ottoman court during Gentile's visit. Angiolello reports an intimate exchange between artist and patron in which Mehmed solicited Gentile's opinion of the character of one of the artist's subjects, a court dervish who was presumed to have gone mad. "Gentile," the Sultan prods, "you know I've always told you that you can speak to me, as long as you speak the truth, so tell me what you think."⁴³ It is easy to picture Mehmed, on other occasions, leafing through Jacopo's sheets of drawings and asking Gentile for an explanation of a particular narrative or an assessment of a pictorial technique.

Mehmed's trust in Gentile is also evident in pen-and-ink drawings the artist made of life inside the palace walls, including neat renderings of a seated janissary soldier and a woman in a tall pointed hat (Figure 2.8). These were likely intended as studies for future work, and that of the woman includes color notations: silver, gold, red, blue, and black. A more finished watercolor of a scribe, later mounted in an album with Persian commentary and currently attributed to Gentile, glows with empathy for the careful labors of its subject.⁴⁴ Together, these images reveal Gentile's considerable access to the peoples and spaces of the Topkapı, indicating that the work permitted of him went well beyond the formulaic or propagandistic tasks more typically assigned to artists at court.⁴⁵

Artists abounded at the Topkapı, bolstered by Mehmed's enthusiastic patronage. They worked in many media and across many purposes, some of these official—public declarations, state imagery, dynastic confirmation—and others more personal.⁴⁶ In the former category lay architecture and book production, and the Sultan tended to give these commissions to his own circle of artists, favoring expatriates like Gentile for private undertakings. The objects they produced included paintings, drawings, medals, and *cose di lussuria*—a category often interpreted by Europeans, in keeping with stereotypes of the degenerate Muslim, as erotic images but more literally translated as works of luxury or opulence.⁴⁷ Mehmed even collected Christian relics and other devotional objects, which he kept in his Treasury and is said to have studied as part of his self-education in the cultural practices of the West.⁴⁸ From Gentile he apparently commissioned a picture of the Virgin Mary, an object that does not survive but might have been part



Figure 2.8 Gentile Bellini (attributed), *Turkish Woman*, pen and black ink on paper, c. 1480, London. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

of Mehmed's investigation—at the intersection of secular portraits and Orthodox icons—into the power of a painted face.

Portraiture occupied court artists and visitors alike. For the most part, local painters adhered to regional traditions, also borrowing liberally from their Timurid neighbors. They worked in miniature, producing book illuminations that, much like European medals, were easily transported and ideal for gifting. Delicately painted, with meticulous attention to detail, the pictures favored close examination but, because of how they were circulated and shared, are best understood as public objects—"public" within the inner circle of the court, that is. In this context, portraits had an official role to play, and a standardized repertoire of signs and symbols helped identify the subjects: a sword or thumb

ring for a soldier or archer, a rose for a poet or scholar, a seated posture for those of most noble rank and a kneeling stance for subordinates. Mehmed, in keeping with his broad curiosity, permitted some manipulation of the formulae. Thus Şiblizade Ahmed's rather surprising portrait of him seems apt, fusing a traditional pose with Western devices of modeling and physiognomy (Figure 2.1).⁴⁹ In sweeping terms, this portrait encapsulates Mehmed's position as heir to the cultural crossroads of Byzantium. Its peculiarity, however, suggests a more intimate function, as an image addressed to Mehmed and his distinctly personal form of patronage.

Gentile's canvas appears at first glance to lie outside this paradigm, sitting squarely in the realm of propagandistic portraiture. It reads as a courtly work with a broadly pronounced message of authority, and it bears all the marks—scale, dignified form and composition, emblematic crowns—of a picture made to aggrandize and ennoble its sitter. Certainly when Mehmed contemplated this image he was contemplating his own majesty.⁵⁰ Likewise, if he showed the painting to others or intended to share it in the form of copies, its imperial voice spoke loud and clear. Some contend that the portrait was conceived as a gift for a foreign, probably European, monarch, a scenario that could explain its production on canvas (not then typical for Gentile but easily transportable),⁵¹ the Latin inscription, and even the overall, alien composition and type.⁵²

If made for copying, dissemination, and export, as so many state portraits of the period were, it lay in the same vein as the medals that were Mehmed's earliest introduction to Western art. Several of these were produced by Italian artists in honor of the Sultan. The most successful is by Costanzo da Ferrara, who was sent from Naples to Mehmed's court in the mid-1470s. His medal pairs the Sultan's striking visage, all dignity and pride, with an equestrian image and inscription in Latin calling him "the thunderbolt of war" (Figure 2.9). Its recollection of Pisanello's *Palaeologus* medal is not a coincidence (Figure 2.5). Mehmed intended Costanzo's medal to circulate west, much as so many European medals had come east, and to carry with it a declaration of power and authority over, among others, the former territories of Byzantium. (An inferior medal by Gentile was likely produced after his return to Venice and without Mehmed's approval; see Figure 2.10).⁵³

Although Gentile's painted portrait is similarly extroverted, an official public image marked with an effusive inscription and symbolic regalia, its importance for Mehmed may well have lain elsewhere, in a more private sphere of inquiry and contemplation. The decorative arch that frames him aptly symbolizes this duality, pushing us back while also inviting us to imagine the presence of the man



Figure 2.9 Costanzo da Ferrara, *Mehmed II*, c. 1481, bronze, Samuel H. Kress Collection, 1957.14.695.a and b. Courtesy of the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.



Figure 2.10 Gentile Bellini, *Mehmed II*, c. 1480 (later casting), bronze, Samuel H. Kress Collection, 1957.14.737.a and b. Courtesy of the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

sitting behind it.⁵⁴ Thus Gentile reminds us of the presentation windows that mediated access to the Sultan and his inner circle, but also of his own encounters with Mehmed that transcended them. The significance of their intimacy should not be underestimated, particularly in the context of portrait painting. Although the Sultan was accustomed to being on display, he was not in the habit of being scrutinized and then transcribed in paint. In this scenario, substantial power lay with the artist.

We return, then, to Gentile's encounters with Mehmed—their conversations, their likely study of Jacopo's drawings, and, eventually, the sessions dedicated to the production of this picture. The Inner Treasury, where Mehmed kept his collections, was one of the most restricted places at court, yet there is good reason to place the two men there, sitting together at a table or across an easel. No mere storage vault, it was also a space of display, with large niches designed for the presentation of objects. Mehmed enjoyed spending time with his collections—including traditional arts and imported curios, objects from classical antiquity and the Christian tradition—in “relaxation and intellectual contemplation.”⁵⁵ He was a voracious student of ancient history who met daily with tutors in Arabic, Greek, and Latin (the latter two from Italy) to discuss important texts. Perhaps they also gathered around one of his prized maps, pinning the great events of the past to the geography of the present. Maybe they discussed artworks, pulled out of niches and carted into the light for closer examination. And maybe some of those imported Italian artists joined in the conversation: Costanzo da Ferrara, for example, or Bartolommeo Bellano, also sent by the Venetians in 1479;⁵⁶ or Bellano's prized and inspiring colleague, Gentile Bellini.

Tell me what you think. This is a history, and also a story, of exchange. We have seen how the mobility of objects is matched by the mobility of ideas, by discourse that, in turn, enriches the objects themselves. From this perspective, Jacopo's album is not just an offering aimed at currying favor but a prompt to conversation that itself generates artistic energy. Italian engravings trace a path from west to east, and at the Ottoman court their status as technological novelties may well outstrip any interest in their subject matter. So too is Gentile's portrait of Mehmed reframed by attention to lived interactions. Figured at the meeting point of two intensely curious individuals, the painting emerges as a product of dialogue rather than the document of a historical encounter. It is the trace of a highly personal give and take, existing somewhere between declaration and introspection, between the realm of courtly propaganda and more private pursuits. Like the court itself, Gentile's portrait of Sultan Mehmed II might best be understood as a contact zone.

Encounters

Artist, Subject, Audiences, and the Matter of Truth in Painting

Painter stands before sitter. He scrutinizes his subject, then returns his gaze to the canvas, already blocked out with an underdrawing and the layers of color that form his picture's substructure. The work of detailed surface transcription is next—the texture of a marble arcade, the gleam of jewels off a draped tapestry, the contours of his sitter's face. He proceeds with caution and care. This sitter is no novice, his interest in painting both keen and profound. For the painter, a test has been set: show me your famous Italian art, his subject seems to say. I've heard about it. I've studied it from afar. Now I'd like to see what it can do.

Painting, according to Leon Battista Alberti's 1436 treatise *On Painting*, was invented by Narcissus, the beautiful young boy who fell in love with his own reflection in a pool.¹ Perhaps Mehmed, well-schooled in both classical and contemporary texts, had this image in mind as he sat across from Gentile, a portraitist who himself hailed from a land of water and light. The Sultan's request to Venice for the loan of a painter was direct: he wanted a skilled one, one who had mastered the art of the *retracto*. The modern Italian translation is "portrait," but in the dialect of the day and according to its linguistic roots, it means a "retracing." Less important than the subject is the intention to convey what is seen with precision.

Gentile Bellini was considered the best such artist in the Venetian Republic, the author of ducal portraits and state commissions. Dismissed by one modern critic as a delineator with a "deadly evenness of emphasis," an unselective transcriber who approached the world more like a mapmaker than an interpretive artist, Gentile was, in fact, precisely the painter his patrons wanted, not only in Venice but abroad.² His careful, topographic renderings of the world were highly prized (Plate 3). Francesco Gonzaga, Marquis of Mantua, commissioned Gentile to paint both a portrait of the Venetian doge and a set of cityscapes, all termed

retracti in the surviving documents. Sultan Mehmed likewise requested portraits and, we are told, a picture of Venice.

Even for modern viewers, Gentile's captivating images of his native city confirm he was a successful transcriber—and in the context of the Ottoman court, perhaps too much so. According to the sixteenth-century artist biographer Giorgio Vasari, it was his pictorial precision that eventually got him dismissed. He made a portrait so lifelike “that [Mehmed] could only imagine Gentile was possessed of some divine spirit.” Vasari claims that the Sultan, fearful of naturalistic representation—a common oversimplification of Islamic attitudes and practices, both then and now—sent Gentile home. The canvas of Mehmed that he left behind, says Vasari, was “considered a miracle” for its veracity.³

Art historians have examined the portrait's truthfulness in another light, not infrequently deeming it among the first, even the first, accurate representations of a Turk in the West.⁴ From this perspective, Mehmed's gaunt cheeks and sallow complexion speak to the illness that will take his life within a year of the picture's completion and confirm Gentile's skill as a documentarian.⁵ The life-like details of his picture, nearly to scale and in vivid color, do not merely reflect what he saw but attest to his authority as witness of the foreign and the unfamiliar. They stand out against other images of sultans and Turks that were circulating in Europe but were generally printed in monochrome or cast in metal, lacking the brilliant verisimilitude of a painted portrait (Chapter 2, Figures 2.6, 2.9, and 2.10).

This thinking adopts the Renaissance notion of painting as a window on the world. It also places Gentile's portrait near the beginning of a practice, barely nascent in this period, of valuing images as a form of visual transcription and of trusting them to report back on distant, unfamiliar places.⁶ Perhaps Gentile envisioned his picture as the visual equivalent of the *relazioni* (diplomatic reports) that were sent with impressive regularity from Istanbul to the Venetian Senate, often cataloging the sultans' features as indicators of temperament, mood, and political fortune.⁷ If such reporting was the painter's aim, we might also ask about his patron's intentions, for Mehmed was sophisticated in both diplomacy and art, no mere subject to Gentile's delineatory brush.

“Truth in representation,” it turns out, offers wide space for interpretive maneuvering. Precision may be in the eyes of the beholder, but so too is its value. What to one is blasphemy, to another is a mark of skill, or a reliable picture of the unknown, or even a challenge to the possibilities of the visual arts. This chapter explores the idea of the lifelike image, also termed “naturalism” and “verisimilitude,” in the context of several critical encounters: painter and sitter; Italian pictorial practices and Ottoman expectations; and the facts and confabulations of

historical narration. The reputation of Gentile's portrait for truthfulness invites us to question its own claims—to precision, but also by whom it was considered truthful, when, and why.

Verisimilitude, at the Ottoman court

Historical rumors suggest that Mehmed was at once skeptical of and fascinated by the powers of pictorial truth. Doubting the anatomical accuracy of a painting by Gentile that depicted the beheading of John the Baptist, the Sultan is said to have summoned a slave and had him decapitated before the artist in order to point out the flaws in his representation of the saint's severed neck. This tale is passed on by Carlo Ridolfi, an Italian biographer of artists who worked on the model of his famous predecessor, Giorgio Vasari.⁸ Ironically, Ridolfi's text begs us to consider what constitutes accuracy in reporting. Writing a hundred years after Vasari and nearly two hundred after Gentile's voyage, his historical distance from the events in question is one concern. So is his reliance on classical sources: the Roman philosopher Seneca offers a nearly identical account of the Greek painter Parrhasius, holding up imitation as the ultimate artistic goal and rooting his own narrative in ancient precedents.⁹ Most significantly, Ridolfi's vision was colored by ongoing European fears of the Ottomans, reputed as dangerous barbarians who acted outside the standards of human decency. This perception lingered on in the nineteenth century, encapsulated in Francesco Hayez's image of the beheading (Figure 3.1): Mehmed's cruel indifference to the kneeling slave is evident in his languid pose and gesture. The trope still circulates, displaced from the Turks onto modern-day extremists and sometimes, regrettably, to the collective Muslim world.¹⁰

The beheading of the slave is almost certainly a myth. But it is one of several stories from a range of sources, including Vasari, that point to Mehmed's ongoing interest in lifelike images. Another comes from Giovanni Maria Angiolello, the Italian resident at court whose eyewitness reports we have already encountered. Angiolello says that Mehmed valued Gentile's renderings—of individuals renowned for their beauty but also of a mad, singing dervish—as trustworthy visual testimony. Mehmed had the dervish painted in order to assess his character; based on Gentile's representation of the man's "wild eyes," the Sultan concluded he was quite unstable.¹¹

Testament of these interests also comes from Mehmed's own hand, in a sketchbook that bears his personal *tuğra* (imperial cipher) and that is housed today in the Topkapı Palace Museum in Istanbul. Its pages abound with drawings



Figure 3.1 Francesco Hayez, *Gentile Bellini, Accompanied by the Venetian Bailo, in the Act of Presenting to Sultan Mehmed II His Painting in which is Depicted the Beheaded St. John the Baptist*, 1834, oil on canvas, private collection, akg-images / De Agostini Picture Library / A. Dagli Orti.

of animals and human figures, including numerous heads and busts that, although crude in execution, reveal an appreciation of facial types in their many, often unflattering particularities: hooked noses, sunken eyes, and precariously high hairlines (Figure 3.2). Considered a *cahier d'enfance*, or youthful sketchbook, its pages point to the Sultan's early interest in some of the things that would occupy him later as a patron, including the human face, portraiture, and an art that captures the vagrancies and irregularities of nature.¹²

This sort of representation—namely a move toward naturalism—was one of the novelties coming out of Europe in the fifteenth century, and Mehmed was well positioned to stay on top of these artistic trends. As we have seen, he spent a significant portion of his formative years in areas of the Ottoman Empire with close connections to European trading communities, including territory near Edirne, where ancient coins and medals were readily available and increasingly valued by collectors and connoisseurs. Perhaps these influenced his own youthful sketches.¹³ By the end of the 1470s, stimulated by stronger connections with the West and favorable political circumstances, Mehmed was concentrating his burgeoning



Figure 3.2 Mehmed II (attributed), *Male Portrait Heads*, c. 1444, TSMK. H.2324, fol. 44b, Topkapı Palace Museum, Istanbul.

patronage activity in Tuscany and the Veneto, centers of prolific artistic production and significant innovation, including a marked interest in pictorial naturalism.

Naturalism and its semantic cousins, verisimilitude and mimesis, are sticky terms, and modern critics often avoid them.¹⁴ They seem to imply that one way of representing the world is more true than another and to prioritize documentation over the many other reasons one might make pictures, including persuasion, hyperbole, and the portrayal of dreams. Scholars working within the traditions of Renaissance Europe have spent generations trying to understand why a naturalistic mode came to dominate picture making in the fifteenth century, while those working outside the field have repeatedly underscored how varied the relationship of art to life can be.¹⁵ We will explore the latter proposition in the context of portraiture momentarily. In the meantime, and with reference to the art of Renaissance Italy, it is worth noting that the practices of Islamic

court artists defied the apparently simple, pervasive notion of picture-as-window. Set in the pages of books rather than on the walls of buildings, their landscapes and interiors, despite clear references to the physical world, aimed at something other than visual transcription. The “truth” of these paintings lay elsewhere, in conveying ritual hierarchy perhaps, or echoing a poetic voice.¹⁶ They were not intended as mirrors of lived visual experience.

Although verisimilitude is not an easy or universal concept, it would be anachronistic to ignore it. Outspoken contemporaries in field, namely those who made, analyzed, and paid for art in fifteenth-century Italy, discussed it extensively and without hesitation. Leon Battista Alberti—an architect and theorist with significant connections to leading patrons of the day—was absolutely clear about the goals and related methods of proper image making. In his highly influential treatise *On Painting*, cited above, Alberti declared the observation of nature to be the source of all representation. “As painting aims to represent things seen, let us note how in fact things are seen,” he writes, before launching into a complex analysis of what he identifies as the principle parts of painting.¹⁷

Grounded in theory, Alberti's treatise is also a technical manual. In order to “represent things seen,” artists are not merely to look and transcribe but to do so via a carefully outlined set of rules and processes. The most codified of these was linear perspective, a system we have already encountered in Jacopo Bellini's book of drawings. The old “railroad tracks meeting on the horizon” idea seems simple enough, but Alberti's effort to systematize this illusionistic device was complex, rooted in mathematics and theories of optics.¹⁸ Alberti painstakingly explains how a successful perspectival construction balances the eventual placement of the artwork with that of the onlooker, whose eye represents an idealized viewpoint and whose field of vision is imagined as a cone of lines intercepted by the flat of the picture plane. Called “orthogonals,” as they push into the image, these lines cross with a set of horizontal markings that span the fictive floor. What results is a grid suggesting rational, measured progression into three-dimensional space—precisely what we see in Jacopo's scene of a beheading (Chapter 2, Figure 2.7). The Albertian system was science and technology at its most evolved, just the sort of thing that would have captured the interest of Mehmed as he pondered the latest developments in Italian art.

Building on the story of Narcissus, Alberti's theory also takes a poetic tack. Painting, he claims, “makes the absent present,” and portraits do so with particular energy. In an echo of voices trailing back to antiquity, Alberti cites the ancient Greek biographer Plutarch, who describes a portrait of the deceased Alexander the Great so lifelike that it made the king Cassander tremble.¹⁹ This is not mere

trickery but an effect powerful enough to impact the physical world—and how could the Sultan resist a painting of such potential? As a close follower of humanistic studies and Italian art, Mehmed likely read Alberti or was at least familiar with his work (he also emulated Alexander as commander and patron, a fact well known in wider diplomatic circles²⁰). If not Alberti, there were plenty of other places to find the trope of the lifelike portrait, one so true that all it lacked was speech.²¹ This is not to claim that all Italian portraits were done from life nor that they actually looked like the sitter, but rather that such portraits were the contemporary standard, a goal to be realized and a widely accepted way of reading a painted face.²² Whatever Mehmed heard about portraiture in Italy, this element was certainly part of it, and we can readily consider naturalism among the most alluring elements of fifteenth-century Italian art.

Naturalism is also fraught with danger: Cassandra was terrified by it; Narcissus tumbled into his pool and died for it; and Islam, some have come to believe, disdains it, even demanding a violent response.²³ This unfortunate stereotype of Muslim attitudes toward representation needs examination and nuance, both to explain how Mehmed could support naturalistic picture making and to make better sense of the “truth” that Gentile’s painting presents.²⁴ It is a commonplace to declare Islamic art anti-iconic, or opposed to the representation of natural, and in particular human, subjects. There is only limited truth to this statement, and only in a strictly devotional context. As is also the case in Judaism and with resonances throughout the history of Christianity, Muslim religious scholars are wary of the risk posed by the visual arts. Idolatry is a serious concern and is expressly forbidden in the Qur’an. Thus Islamic practice disallows the display of figurative images in mosques and sacred texts, and a rich tradition of decorative motifs, based on floral forms and the graceful lines of Arabic script, takes precedence.

The Qur’an contains no explicit proscriptions against image making, including the production of human likenesses; no such ban was ever codified into doctrine. Representation, even of the Prophet Muhammad, has a long and deep history, in books dedicated to his life and miraculous ascension along with works of poetry, augury, and lore.²⁵ Nevertheless, a strong prohibitive tradition against imagery grew up in the extensive juridical and theological commentaries that shaped daily life. Qur’anic language clearly equates the verb *ṣawwara* (to fashion) with *barā’a* (to create), leading some interpreters to associate making, particularly the work of artists, with God’s own creative acts—risking both hubris and blasphemy. Images of the natural world were the most threatening and early commentators dealt with them at length, debating what could be copied in what form, as well as where and how images could properly be used.²⁶

Art historian David J. Roxburgh offers several ways of understanding representational imagery in this context.²⁷ An abstracted human figure might be a means of side-stepping the dangers of naturalism, rendering a person recognizable but avoiding all-out mimicry. We might identify the figure without the illusion that he is sitting before us, cued by turban, cushion, frame, inscription, and so forth (Chapter 4, Figure 4.3 and Plate 4). Or the artist might aim to represent essences greater than physical form, intangibles like character or even the soul. One tradition from sixteenth-century Persia suggested that acceptable portraits were those that looked past the visible world to something beyond, avoiding the trickery and traps of naturalistic imagery. In this context, even a picture of the Prophet Muhammad, if derived from a divine, unseen source, might be acceptable in theory; in practice, the Ottomans developed instead the *hilye*, a talismanic word portrait made up of authenticated verbal descriptions arranged in a calligraphic diagram.²⁸ Another Persian tradition from a century earlier held that, in Paradise, all humans attain physical sameness, meaning that the specificities of their earthly forms are not relevant to honest representation. In this case, abstraction might be its own kind of visual truth. Clearly, Islam and its interpreters did not—and do not—have a monolithic understanding of naturalistic imagery.

Figurative imagery, including portraiture, interested a handful of thinkers outside the theological sphere, although attention to and positive assessment of naturalistic presentation in their texts is rare.²⁹ In his preface to a royal album of 1544–5, the Persian painter Dost-Muhammad signals tolerance for portraitists because, he claims, their craft went back to the time of the Prophet and a set of divinely produced images: “Therefore portraiture is not without justification,” is his lukewarm assessment.³⁰ Associates of the late-fifteenth-century Timurid Sultan Husayn Bayqara reportedly passed around portrait miniatures and debated their merits as likenesses.³¹ Most famous was the case of the third-century prophet Mani, whose skills as an illusionistic painter were said to have prompted religious conversions in China. Tales of Mani were popular in Persianate circles around the time of Mehmed II.³² A century later, in his *Epic Deeds of Artists* (1585–7), the Ottoman intellectual Mustafa Ali praised Mani’s “wonder-working reed pen” and skills of mimesis, comparing his imagery to transparent water and a “world-illuminating mirror.” He retells a famous episode in which Mani “render[ed] a dog’s carcass with [such] assurance [...] that the worms on the corpse were visible, [...] moving and quivering [...]. [B]ut for the missing smell it had no defect.” In the end, Mani gave his life for refusing to denounce this “wicked picture,” his body flayed and his skin stuffed with straw. Even in secular contexts, flashes of interest in verisimilitude are interspersed with profound anxiety over its implications.³³

Further complicating this picture are the distinctive circumstances of the Islamic courts. As their patronage confirms, the practices of sovereigns were not measured against ordinary standards of behavior, and attitudes toward pictorial representation varied from ruler to ruler.³⁴ Sultan Mehmed, who was not particularly driven by religious motives, promoted figurative painting; his son Bayezid II, on the other hand, is said to have disposed of his father's art collection out of a sense of offended orthodoxy. As we have seen, portraits in the Islamic world were generally miniatures, set in the pages of books (Chapter 4, Figure 4.3). Gentile's portrait, nearly life-size and self-sufficient, stood quite literally outside this tradition: if framed and hung on a wall, it had the potential for public pronouncements, akin to the boastful ceremonial program also developed under Mehmed.³⁵ The choice of scale, form, and even naturalistic manner can be seen as an expression of grandeur, of the power of the ruler to push against prescribed boundaries and break expectations.³⁶

Yet Mehmed's adventurous, exploratory patronage, including his interest in naturalism, suggests a different role for Gentile's portrait. Soon after the painter's return to Venice, and possibly with his input, the chronicler Jacopo Filippo Foresti claimed that Mehmed had invited Gentile to Istanbul to "test his skill," claiming the portrait was commissioned "that his entire art might be tested even further [. . .]."³⁷ We can imagine the Sultan's challenge to the Venetian painter as he posed for him in the Inner Treasury, a space of inquiry and learning: not tell me what you think but show me what you and your new form of painting can do. In this version of the story, verisimilitude is Gentile's answer to a challenge, the painter taking on the role of Narcissus or embodying the reflective Venetian waters. It sets naturalism up as a technological challenge: Can you invent an impenetrable fortress? Print a drawing? Can you, Gentile Bellini, paint the truth? We do not know if Gentile's answers satisfied Mehmed. Perhaps the painter was too successful, frightening the Sultan with his mimetic powers—that is what Giorgio Vasari reports, although he is notoriously unreliable. The Sultan died in 1481, six months after his portrait was completed, having no chance to pursue these pictorial explorations further.

One thing we can be sure of is that Gentile's portrait was not produced to demonstrate to the Western world what a Turk actually looked like. This is a common assumption, occasionally stated and frequently assumed, but it is an anachronism, or at least a confounding of the painting's site of production with its place of eventual reception—assuming for the moment that was Venice in the 1480s. There, the very genre of portraiture had the ring of truth; mimetic portraits were familiar and trusted. Acceptance of the type could easily be confused, then and now, with the accuracy of a particular image. In addition, we

are looking back at this picture from a later era, colored by colonial expansion and the related Enlightenment ambition to catalog a proliferation of newly discovered flora, fauna, territories, and peoples.³⁸ It is true that, in 1481, few Europeans had seen a Turk, much less a sultan (not the same thing, as Mehmed was the first to note³⁹); it is also true that many contemporary images of Turks trafficked in stereotypes (Plate 2) and were rarely based on eyewitness accounts; it may even be true that Gentile's work is one of the first to offer an image of an Ottoman that could be matched to nature.

But Mehmed had no need to verify his own appearance—a reflecting pool, in the manner of Narcissus, would do just as well; he almost surely owned some sort of mirror, perhaps even a fine glass of the sort for which Venice was rapidly gaining renown.⁴⁰ Nor is there reason to think he needed to communicate his precise physiognomy to other rulers; communicating an aura of majesty was a more likely priority. From the Sultan's perspective as patron, the subject of Gentile's work was not exotic but fully familiar. The role of the artist's brush was not to transmit information abroad but to demonstrate just what it was that this imported mode of painting could do, permitting the Sultan to examine in close detail the successes and failures of that art. Perhaps Gentile's success was so great, his work so overpoweringly lifelike, as to get him shipped back home.

Verisimilitude, in Venice

Gentile Bellini stepped off the boat in Venice less than two years after leaving for the Ottoman court, now dressed *alla turca*, donning a turban and wrapped in a "Phrygian" cloak—that is, in a style associated with the ancient Greek colonies of western Anatolia, then Ottoman territory and today Turkish. Around his neck he wore a medallion and chain of gold given to him by the Sultan, and in his pocket he carried a letter of commendation from Mehmed, praising him as a "golden knight and palace companion."⁴¹ Freshly returned from Istanbul, in 1481, he incorporated references to both his courtly status and his Ottoman experiences into his signature on the *Departure of the Venetian Ambassadors to the Court of the [Holy Roman] Emperor Frederick Barbarossa*, a painting that hung prominently in the Great Council Hall of the Ducal Palace in Venice until it was destroyed by fire in 1577.⁴² Its ambassadorial theme was fortuitous, particularly since Frederick III, heir to the twelfth-century Frederick Barbarossa, had in 1469 granted Gentile the title of Palatine Knight.⁴³ In a later canvas representing *Saint Mark Preaching in Alexandria*, Gentile's claims to diplomatic rank take

visual form: the artist stands in the foreground wearing the gold chain given to him by Mehmed and, hanging from it, a medal emblazoned with the three crowns symbolic of Ottoman territorial dominion.⁴⁴ The chain appears in other images of Gentile as well, including a portrait medal by Antonio Gambello of 1500, a print illustrating Carlo Ridolfi's 1648 *Wonders of Art* (*Meraviglie dell'arte*), where it supports a portrait medallion of Mehmed, and an eighteenth-century version of that print in which Gentile also clasps a small sketch of the Sultan (Figure 3.3). Three centuries later, the painter's efforts at self-promotion had clearly succeeded.

At the core of Gentile's public image was his reputation as an experienced traveler and a trustworthy eyewitness. This concept immediately returns us to



Figure 3.3 Giovanni Battista Cecchi after T. I. Ridolfi, *Gentile Bellini, Venetian Painter*, engraving, in Sante Pacini et al., *Serie degli uomini più illustri*, vol. 2 (Florence, 1770), pl. 42, The Getty Research Institute. Courtesy of the HathiTrust.

the challenging matter of naturalism. For trust in Gentile as documentarian could not come through the channels we might expect: very few people who saw the portrait of Mehmed outside the walls of the Topkapı Palace would have been able to attest to its accuracy, never having met the Sultan. They could not compare image to model as they might have with other portraits, or as Mehmed himself surely had done. But they might have undertaken this sort of visual exercise elsewhere on Gentile's canvas: its illusionistic marble frame, considered against the contemporary portal of San Zaccaria in Venice (Figure 3.4), for example, affirms Gentile's skill in imitating the natural world, as do many of his other pictures of the city's architecture (Plate 3).⁴⁵ In judging the "truth" of Mehmed's appearance, Venetian viewers could extend trust in Gentile's brush to his transcription of a face.



Figure 3.4 Antonio Gambello, Portal, San Zaccaria, Venice, 1458–80. Photo © Teresa Turacchio.

They also had to rely on more indirect and less precise cues than verifiable mimesis. One such cue was Gentile's self-promoted reputation as an envoy to the Ottoman court, and in this context his vocation as an artist may have worked to real advantage. Travelers of the medieval and early modern periods often wrote about a loss of words in the face of the unfamiliar—that a place was just too wondrous (or horrendous) to describe. They imply, and on occasion even state, that pictures might better convey what only the eye can take in: "I would not know how to describe [this] for you except by a picture [. . .] if I only knew how to paint," wrote a medieval Franciscan voyager to the Mongol court.⁴⁶ Similar sentiments regarding the limits of words echo through Venetian texts from the twelfth century through Gentile's own day. As Giosafat Barbaro wrote about things seen during his time as ambassador to Persia in the 1470s, "Some will think that what I say is not true, and yet it is true, as those who have seen it know."⁴⁷ To paraphrase his compatriot and contemporary, the historian Marcantonio Sabellico, things that can hardly be believed when written are evident in the miracle of pictures.⁴⁸

Gentile had seen the "indescribable" Ottoman capital and had even painted its sovereign.⁴⁹ Cleverly, he verified his credentials as visual witness through words. His signature on the London portrait, because of its fragmentary survival, cannot be fully deciphered and is difficult to translate; only the dating is clearly legible. But laboratory examinations suggest that, despite heavy restoration, the present inscription faithfully reproduces the original. Thus one interpretation reads: "the true skill of Gentile Bellini, nature's golden soldier, recalls the Sultan's [appearance], [and] represents all things in their particularities [. . .]. [Gentile] made this same image on the 25th day of the month of November 1480."⁵⁰ The painter's claim to witnessing is clear, rooted both in the language of naturalism and in a precise dating that certifies his encounter with Mehmed.⁵¹

Less clear is the audience for this inscription—if it was added for the benefit of the Sultan, for Gentile, or for other, more distant spectators. Like the image of Mehmed, its value shifts according to context and viewership. In Istanbul, in 1480, under the Sultan's watchful eye, it might have been a statement of modernity and currency, or an authorial flourish underscoring the work's completion. In Venice, years later, it had other implications (if that is where it ended up; we will pursue the portrait's fate after 1481 in the next chapter). Even if this distant, imagined audience was unaware of the specifics of Gentile's itinerary, the inscription insists on a precise moment of production, claiming unequivocally that the painter had sat across from the sitter and studied his countenance in person. Faith in such encounters was the necessary "fiction" behind authoritative works of Renaissance portraiture.⁵²

This is the same sort of encounter essential to the *retracto*, the “retracing” or, in modern translations, the “portrait.” Recall that this was the key skill demanded of artists that Venice was to send to Istanbul in 1479: Mehmed, according to the Venetian interpreter Malipiero, sought “un bon depentor che sapia retrazer,” “a good painter who knows how to make *retracti*.” Even though the modern term, *ritratto*, is conventionally translated as “portrait” (of a face), the word itself points most literally not to subject matter but to the relationship between an image and that which it claims to represent. At its linguistic root, *retracto* means “re-traced”; its core refers to an action, tracing, and by extension to the relationship of an image to the thing traced. This relationship is rooted in an actual encounter: the Latin *tractus* implies a direct, causal connection between a source and its “trace,” that is, the image.⁵³ A *retracto*, in Venetian terminology, was a mode of representation characterized by a careful transcription of visual appearances, and dependent on things seen.⁵⁴ This understanding of the *retracto* is supported by Giuseppe Boerio’s dictionary of the Venetian dialect, first published in 1856: here, the definition of the verb *retrar* concerns not the depiction of a face, as one might again expect, but the specific act of painting or sculpting “after nature.”⁵⁵ We might be reminded of Narcissus and his reflecting pool, or of Mehmed’s investigations into the power of painting. We might also think of the *retracto*, in the context of people like Gentile, as an eyewitness report on distant travels given visual form.

Indeed, one explanation for the humble, almost folksy nature of much Venetian imagery around 1500 lies in local understandings of reliability and truth-telling—the core values of the eyewitness. Art historian Patricia Fortini Brown argues that standards for history painting and history writing were different in Venice than they were in classically minded Tuscany, where the most venerated histories focused on exemplary events and the moral lessons to be drawn from them. In texts, typically written in Latin, this took the form of causal narratives in which sequenced events led to defined outcomes that often held larger, ethical implications. Likewise in painting, the Tuscan mode was clear and didactic, with momentous occasions highlighted through singular, unmistakable focus. Venetian writers preferred to tell their city’s story through diaries and chronicles, layering detail upon detail in a colorful first-person voice, generally in Italian or the local dialect. In these modes of writing, “history” is a series of daily occurrences, lined up in chronological order, the mundane sitting alongside the monumental. Familiar language and the details of quotidian life made such narratives both authentic and believable.⁵⁶ Fortuitously, they also call up some of my own, introductory musings on the variable forms history writing can take.

Gentile Bellini's scenographic paintings, like those of his contemporaries Vittore Carpaccio and Giovanni Mansueti, embody this eyewitness approach. Not only are they thick in descriptive detail, but they have a neutral quality suggestive of a scanning eye and objective hand. All elements, from a picture's protagonist to its local setting and supporting cast in familiar dress, are given equal attention. Gentile's famous *Procession in Piazza San Marco*, for example, is a riot of visual information with no clear point of rest or focus (Plate 3). Although the richly wrought church facade attracts the eye, it is not the center of the narrative, which lies elsewhere, with a miracle hidden in the crowds of people.⁵⁷ Those crowds are the witnesses. They are reliable locals, identified as such by intricate, insider details: the red togas of patricians, the insignia on the white robes of processing confraternity members, the individualized faces (indeed, portraits) of Venetian residents—Venetians who through their presence verify the miracle, perhaps heading straight home from the piazza to record it in a diary or chronicle.⁵⁸ Gentile's picture is the painted equivalent of those texts, offering a visual transcription in which many minute, seemingly insignificant specifics add up to a persuasive whole.⁵⁹

His portraits, although less elaborate, have a similar neutrality of treatment. Despite the damage to the surface of the Sultan portrait, it is clear that the ornate tapestry and architecture were rendered in at least as lively a brush as that used to depict the sitter. Although the composition directs our attention to Mehmed, the labors of Gentile's hand do not: our eye is as busy toward the picture's edges as at the center. According to the modern critic quoted earlier, this "deadly evenness of emphasis" reveals "the mind of a cartographer"; Gentile's works, he says, lack a focus or an objective beyond that of charting a physical surface.⁶⁰ But our study of his other paintings and of the Venetian eyewitness mode offers another, more helpful interpretation. Careful, map-like transcriptions—*retracti*—were evidence in the Venetian context of fidelity to nature, reliability as image-maker, and authority as eyewitness. Gentile's portrait of Mehmed claims truthfulness through its transcriptive manner. Its style confirms that what we see on the canvas is what we might encounter were we to be transported to where we cannot go, behind the thick walls and into the secret third court of the Topkapı Palace.

Underlying this history is the question of how we come to trust pictures to tell us about things we have never seen, and the role imagery plays in mediating the unfamiliar. Recently and along the same lines, *National Geographic* magazine—an infamous source of exoticizing imagery in our own day—did some soul-searching. Acknowledging that its venerable pages had contributed mightily to corrosive notions of race, the magazine hired historian John Edwin Mason to dig into its

archives and study how its own biases, priorities, and outlooks had shaped representations and silences about marginalized peoples, abroad but also within Europe and the United States. Mason took a great interest in imagery, noting how often non-whites remained literally at the edge of the photograph, as servants and helping hands. When “natives” were featured, the magazine’s editor explains, *National Geographic* “pictured [them] as exotic, famously and frequently unclothed, happy hunters, noble savages—every type of cliché.”⁶¹ We all know the sorts of images in question, and may remain guiltily fascinated by them. Mason notes that photographs “give us permission to stare,” and those in the pages of *National Geographic* allow us to “see things that are not the same as [our] people and where [we] live.” Today the magazine, wed to its mission to “illuminate the human journey,” avows that it has “a duty, in every story, to present accurate and authentic depictions.” But surely accuracy was always its watchword. What is new is less a loyalty to truth in representation than a critical, self-aware stance toward what constitutes truth and how it is produced, particularly in regard to subjects different from ourselves.

The lessons taken from *National Geographic* can be projected back onto the early modern period as well, inviting us to think harder about why, how, and to what ends pictures of the “exotic Other” were produced. In the case of Gentile Bellini, we can conclude, first, that his portrait of Mehmed is not, above all else, the documentation of an alien subject for Western eyes, as art history told from a European perspective would have it; it represents, conversely and equally, a Turkish appropriation of an Italian art form. This is easy enough to see in the context of process—that is, Mehmed’s ability to identify, hire, transport, and command an admired Venetian portraitist, perhaps with the intention of circulating copies of the picture to further assert his dominance, possibly locally or possibly abroad.

But the appropriation we have investigated was more nuanced than this, and lay at the fundamental level of motivation. Within the Topkapı Palace, between Gentile and Mehmed, the genre of the state portrait operated as a showpiece for the mimetic possibilities of painting; Mehmed had made of this portrait a test, laying claim to a foreign genre and redefining it in the context of his own interests. From Mehmed’s perspective, the picture Gentile painted was not an apparently truthful document of the foreign. Rather, at the moment of its production, the portrait constituted an exploration of the possibilities of pictorial documentation. This is a significantly different project, one that recasts a supposedly exotic representation in its original role as an image of the most closely familiar—not of the Other but the Self. On the surface of Gentile’s canvas, the Ottoman sultan remade Venetian painting as much as the other way around.

History, Memory, and the Trails from Istanbul to Venice

By now we should have Gentile's picture burned into our minds. But how well can we actually recall it without flipping the pages to have another look or doing a quick check on Google? In our image-saturated lives, where we can literally bring up a world of pictures with our fingertips, it is hard to imagine a time when pictures were rare and impermanent—rare in that there were fewer and far fewer people had access to them; impermanent in that, once out of view, the image was also out of reach. Save the unlikely possibility of a copy in paint or print, a picture existed only in memory, and memory is notoriously unreliable.

As far as the historical record goes, Gentile Bellini's portrait of Mehmed II was nothing but a memory for nearly 400 years. After the painter's return to Venice in 1481, the trail of his picture went cold. Hints and rumors suggest it was exiled to Italy, banished there by the piety of Mehmed's son Bayezid II, who felt more aversion than awe toward mimetic art. No one can confidently point to its whereabouts again until it appears, rather mysteriously, in Venice in 1865. In the meantime, the picture had a spectral presence, periodically surfacing in references to collectors in Venice, Como, and Istanbul. A common theme was its status as a trustworthy likeness of the Sultan. This is memory wrapped around memory: the picture was recalled as a reliable tool for the proper recollection of Mehmed.

Our search for Gentile's portrait during this interlude of four centuries is also about reliability and the trust we put in sources, about how to balance the traces of remembrance and the demands of history. We may want to separate these forms of recollection as subjective and objective, but in the hazier passages of time any such distinction is itself an illusion. The three scenarios that follow all bear out this investigative conundrum. Each is grounded in a claim to truth—a treatise, an illustrated book, diplomatic records—that leads compellingly toward the portrait. Their trails sometimes overlap, yet they cannot coexist; nor do they ever arrive definitively at Gentile's picture. There remains a narrow but

unbridgeable gap between what we know of the painting's travels and what we must try to understand through conjecture.

Hanging in a Venetian palace?

Our hunt for the portrait begins in the market stalls of Istanbul, crowded, chaotic, loaded with goods from around the world. The Venetian traders are at home here—indeed, under the Byzantines, the Venetian community was so large that it was considered a nation unto itself, headquartered in an advantageous spot in the old city, near markets and the centers of political power (Chapter 2, Figure 2.3). After the Ottoman conquest of 1453, along with other foreign residents, the Venetians were forced to move across the waters of the Golden Horn to the port neighborhood of Galata (Pera), and their numbers fluctuated along with the cycles of peace and war that characterized relations between the doge and the sultan.¹ In the fifteenth century, trade was traditionally an elite business. Most of the Venetians overseeing this activity were worldly members of the patrician class, well connected, often with deep roots in Istanbul and deep pockets. A young nobleman and future doge named Andrea Gritti (Figure 4.1), for example, spent several decades in the city trading grain, learning Turkish, and befriending some of the most powerful figures at court, among them Sultan Bayezid II.²

The Venetians dealt in merchandise of all sorts, including spices (mostly pepper), raw silk, cotton, and leather. Trade was licit and illicit, with contraband such as weapons and even slaves routinely smuggled out among legitimately traded goods.³ Treasures of Eastern manufacture, including carpets, ceramics, and richly inlaid metalwork, were tucked in among more quotidian merchandise, shipped back to Venice for display in the homes of wealthy residents. Paintings were not typically part of this cargo, but perhaps some lucky merchant stumbled across Bayezid's strange discards while wandering through the market stalls of Istanbul, adding a portrait of Mehmed to his stash of textiles and other luxuries bound for Venice. This is what Gentile's compatriot at the Ottoman court, Giovanni Maria Angiolello, reports in his *Historia Turchesca*.⁴ Since the portrait was painted on canvas, the buyer could have easily rolled it up and stuck it in a pouch, together with letters, maps, and the other documents of a busy merchant.⁵

Maybe the merchant was Andrea Gritti himself, trawling the market in search of a deal on grain. Or maybe Gritti got it directly from Bayezid in some encounter lost to history. Gritti was close enough to Bayezid to be able to call on him in 1499, when he was accused, rightly, of smuggling military secrets back to Venice among



Figure 4.1 Titian, *Doge Andrea Gritti*, 1546/48, oil on canvas, Samuel H. Kress Collection, 1961.9.45. Courtesy of the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

his commercial correspondence. A plea to the Sultan's grand vizier saved Gritti from execution, although he did spend several years in prison.⁶ Might Bayezid, in the period of trust before this transgression, have favored Gritti with Mehmed's portrait, offensive to his orthodox Muslim sensibilities but an appropriate token for a cultured Venetian? As we have seen, gifts were a key currency of diplomacy and portraits sometimes a part of this. Gritti's own image, worked in oil around 1545 by Titian, the most important portraitist of sixteenth-century Venice (Figure 4.1), offers an interesting dialogue with Gentile's work: both men look sternly to the left, their sharply cut profiles topped with ornate headgear and their layered robes, in rich reds and golds, leaping out against a dark ground. It is tempting to think that Gritti was at least familiar with Gentile's picture even if he never saw it.

Likely he was, for Gentile's fame as a traveler was widespread in Venice and his painting of Mehmed, wherever it was by the date of Titian's portrait, already

of significant repute. But how and why? What can we learn from the whispers that seem to have followed it, whispers that add up to rumor but little more? One possibility is that after its journey from Istanbul, maybe in that merchant's bag, it was placed on the walls of a palace in Venice to be enjoyed by its owner and his visitors. Although most paintings in this period were produced for large, common spaces—primarily churches and public palaces—there was a growing interest in smaller works intended for the home. Before the genre grew to include so-called cabinet pictures, depicting primarily landscapes, domestic interiors, and still lifes, portraits were favored—and Gentile, as we have already seen, was considered a master of the genre. If his portrait of Sultan Mehmed came back to Venice in the 1480s or 1490s, Gentile was alive, well, and building his reputation as a knowledgeable traveler. To possess a work by this prestigious artist would have been a coup.

One candidate for this triumph is the Zeno family. In his 1648 *Wonders of Art*, Carlo Ridolfi reports that Pietro Zeno had in his house a portrait of Mehmed brought to Venice by Gentile himself.⁷ Ridolfi's text is distant from these events and we must proceed with caution. He might exaggerate things like ownership to enhance the “wonders” of the art he sets out to describe; none of the various collection chroniclers of the mid-1500s singles out the painting or the Zeno family. He might simply have the wrong picture in mind. There is, in fact, a tangled knot of attribution around a few other portraits of Mehmed, including one reportedly sold by the Zenos to Lord Northwick of Great Britain in 1825.⁸ But several kernels of truth stand out in Ridolfi's text and offer encouraging leads. First is his belief that, by the date of his book, the painting had been in Venice for many decades. Whether or not it was Gentile who carted it back, Ridolfi may well have the larger timeframe right, meaning that the picture had long been in Venice (or Italy; the plot will thicken). Second is his indication of the Zeno family. We cannot trace the picture definitively to them, but they can stand in for its possible owners, as types, helping us understand what it might have meant to own a painting like this in Venice in the sixteenth century. They seem as likely a candidate for ownership as any.

The Zeno, or “Zen” in Venetian, were a family of long-standing power and reputation. They were part of the Venetian nobility going back to the very founding of the city, providing a doge (Renieri Zen, elected in 1252) and soldiers in the crusader battles for Constantinople around 1200. They were merchants, diplomats, and, legend had it, travelers who had explored the farthest regions of the North Atlantic in the fourteenth century.⁹ Some stories put two Zen brothers in the Americas before Columbus—unlikely, but part of the

mythology of a bold and adventurous family. One Pietro Zen (there were many over the years) was part of a diplomatic retinue to the Ottomans in the 1530s, bearer of fine gifts, among them a “unicorn horn”; his son Francesco presented Sultan Süleyman I with a watch so small it fit inside a ring.¹⁰ There was also a non-noble, citizen branch of the family that was likely acknowledged by patrician relations even if it was deemed lesser by the republic itself.¹¹ The Zen left important architectural markers in Venice, including tombs at the basilica of SS. Giovanni e Paolo and a chapel, the Cappella Zen, at San Marco, the city’s most important church.

Several Venetian palaces bear their name as well, the legacy of a family tree with lofty but entangled branches. There is the Palazzo Zen in the center of the city, richly ornamented in a way that belies its nickname, *Ca’ Zen*, or “Zen House.” This false modesty is found all over Venice, where palaces, *palazzi*, masquerading as modest dwellings, are termed houses, *case* or *ca’* in the Venetian dialect that loves to clip words and speak in code. *Ca’ Zen* dates to the late fourteenth century, built by Carlo Zen, a sea captain honored for defeating the rival island community of Chioggia in 1380. His triumphs were portrayed in fresco paintings on the exterior of another Palazzo Zen, this one located in the relatively remote district of Cannaregio and built between 1533 and 1553 under the direction of Francesco Zen. Francesco’s family outpost stretches along the Rio di Santa Caterina, expansive enough to accommodate his family and those of his three brothers. In addition to paintings of Carlo’s military exploits, the Cannaregio palace is ornamented with exoticizing low-relief sculptures of palm trees, camels, and the gates of far-off cities. The alternation of arched windows, rounded then pointed, was a formula used in contemporary paintings to signal exoticism; here the pattern encodes in stone a memory of the family’s overseas exploits.¹²

Thus there were two Zen residences, one standing and one not yet built, when Gentile returned from Istanbul and likely when his picture made its trip to Venice. If the Zen family acquired his portrait of Mehmed, as Ridofi says, it probably came to hang on the walls of one of these homes. In the late fifteenth century, it would have been something of an oddity, as picture collecting tended to be restricted to small-scale religious works, allegorical imagery, and family portraits. Devotional images were placed in the home’s more private quarters, where they could be contemplated quietly; paintings of classical subjects were likewise suited to a *studiolo* (study) or other place of reflection. But portraits were public and most often displayed in the *portego*, the architectural spine of the home that ran from the grand windows at the front through to a courtyard in back. This was the formal greeting area, where guests landed when they stepped off the grand

staircase onto the *piano nobile*—literally, the “noble floor,” site of daily living—and where they might wait to meet the head of the household. Fronted with large windows, the *portego* danced in the light that reflected off the canal below, darting from the glass chandeliers and across polished terrazzo floors. Along the walls were paintings, typically an enfilade of stately family portraits.

The idea of family pictures as public objects may seem contrary, even ostentatious, but all portraiture in this period was understood as an art of presentation, the sitter performing for viewers: pose, garments, and something held in the hand demonstrated wealth and good taste. Most Venetian portraits, including Gentile's picture of Mehmed, were less expressions of the soul than statements jointly crafted by artist and patron to impress. Lined up along the walls of a grand *portego*, such portraits literalized continuity and dynasty—father, son, and grandson, all contributing to the historic fame of Venice, stretching back in time and promising the future. By the later sixteenth century, it was not unusual to have pictures of foreign rulers, including Ottoman sultans, mixed in with family portraits, maps, and even mirrors, creating a “cosmopolitan context” for imagining oneself and one's family.¹³ For the Zen, who were using sculpture and architecture to publicize their history overseas, a painting of Sultan Mehmed by a renowned witness to him and his distant court would have been a coveted souvenir, reminding visitors of the Zens' own accomplishments in the eastern Mediterranean.

Another member of the Zen family floats in and out of this narrative, namely Caterino, married to a niece of Uzun Hasan, the Turkoman sultan whose territories lay to the east of the Ottomans. Perhaps it was this kinship that led to Caterino's selection in 1470 to travel to the court at Tabriz and negotiate an alliance against Mehmed.¹⁴ He returned successful, only to have Uzun Hasan lose to the Ottoman armies a few years later. A portrait of Mehmed in the house of the Zen—Caterino was the grandfather of Francesco, patron of the exotically illustrated palace in Cannaregio—might have been read as a trophy, the head of the enemy not on a pike but in a frame.

Could it be that someone gave the portrait to the Zen family in recognition of their efforts in the fight against the Ottomans? It would have been an unusual but effective tool of recollection. This fight was heating up again in the sixteenth century, particularly after the siege of Vienna (1529), which brought Ottoman armies to the doorstep of Europe. Printed representations of the “Turk” proliferated. These Turks tended to be ugly and overtly menacing, far less dignified than Gentile's depiction of Mehmed—yet its story would have been different hanging in the family palace of the Zen.¹⁵ Not all sultan portraits were equal, nor were all contexts alike.

Copy in Como?

Thus we have the rumor of the Zen, which we have amplified and explored. Another hint—tied to printed images and pictorial series—takes us outside Venice to the northern Italian town of Como, where we meet Paolo Giovio, a historian, biographer, and collector with a strongly developed philosophy of portraiture. Giovio claimed to own a portrait of Mehmed II by Gentile Bellini. Did he? And was it our portrait? The suggestion is problematic but it demands our attention, given how few and far between these historical traces are.

Born in 1483, Giovio was in Rome by 1512, where he quickly worked his way into the elevated intellectual circles affiliated with the papal court. His texts are primarily assemblages of biographies but Giovio termed himself a historian, largely because of the hierarchy of genres that elevated history above other forms of writing and the prestige associated with facts and verifiability. For Giovio, the physical form of his historical subjects signaled qualities of soul and spirit that guided their actions; these, in turn, compelled and explained the larger unfolding of historical events. Giovio was also fascinated by the *impresa*, a type of emblem that brings words and images together into symbolic form. These interests added up to a deep engagement with the ability and limits of pictures to convey truth, particularly about matters of personal character.

It is thus not surprising that Giovio collected portraits, which he installed in the 1540s in a purpose-built villa outside Como that he termed his “Museo” (museum). Rather than family portraits of the type we have seen in Venice, these were part of a popular category of images of “famous men” (only very occasionally women) that ornamented the private quarters of elite scholar-collectors in Renaissance Italy. This is no small distinction, not only because of the differing categories of sitter—honored uncle versus famed military ruler, for example—but because of the expectations for likeness that the pictures presume. We might well imagine that an uncle’s portrait resembles the uncle, that we could pick him out at a family gathering based on the picture, but it would be a stretch to assume the same for a portrait of Timur, founder of the eponymous empire. So how would a historian like Giovio, someone who placed great value on the authority of facts, assure himself and the visitors to his museum that the portraits in his collection were reliable images of their subjects? What constituted reliability for Giovio?

The question is similar to the one we asked about Mehmed’s portrait at the Ottoman court and in Venice after Gentile’s return. Before we address it, however, we must clear up a different matter of identity, namely whether our London

portrait was ever in Como at all. Giovio owned a series of sultanic portraits, ranging from Osman, founder of the Ottoman dynasty, to Süleyman I, “the Magnificent,” Giovio’s contemporary. In the publication that accompanied his collection, the *Elogia*, he attributes his picture of Mehmed to Gentile Bellini, and there are elements of the London figure that align with Giovio’s stylistic preferences, including a figure set against a simple black background and, in the manner of the *impresa*, a legend that tells us who we are looking at.¹⁶ But the image by Tobias Stimmer in the illustrated version of the *Elogia*, published in 1575 with woodcuts after Giovio’s pictures (Figure 4.2), bears little resemblance to Gentile’s London portrait, suggesting that the source was a different image, perhaps by Gentile (but why has a second such picture gone forgotten?), or a fusion of portraits by one or more artists.¹⁷ The rose in Mehmed’s right hand evokes Ottoman pictures (Chapter 2, Figure 2.1 and Chapter 4, Figure 4.3c), while



Figure 4.2 Tobias Stimmer, *Mehmed II*, woodcut, in Paolo Giovio, *Elogia virorum bellica virtute illustrium* (Basel, 1575), p. 164, Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library.

the facial features recall Gentile's medal of Mehmed produced after his return to Venice (Chapter 2, Figure 2.10). If there was a portrait of Mehmed by Gentile in Giovio's collection, as he claims, it does not seem to have been our picture.

Authenticity mattered to Giovio because it was a guarantee of reliability, the product of a face-to-face encounter that resulted in a trustworthy facsimile of the sitter.¹⁸ His collection was not about the individual but about categories: great general, wise ruler, sage philosopher. Like an elite Renaissance stamp collection, his galleries grouped portraits by type, and he favored a stiff, formulaic composition that relied on costume, props, and painted text to distinguish its subjects. This hard-nosed attitude was less poetic than practical, not intended to convey interiority as Rembrandt and Van Gogh might have, but to communicate the physical and, from there, a certain moral precept.¹⁹ Giovio's typological, serial approach to collecting likewise positioned historical figures as exemplars rather than as individuals. In this context, Alexander the Great interested Giovio for what he represented as king; his personal qualities were only important as they spoke to leadership, something most clearly captured by accoutrements, titles, and the generalized, stereotypical contours of the face.

Another understanding of reliability, and a particular pride of Renaissance portrait artists, was their ability to convey the physical presence of the sitter, even to fool viewers into thinking that person lived and breathed right beside them. "Art turned into nature itself," is how the poet and critic Pietro Aretino put it with regard to Titian's work, but this widely used formula goes back to antiquity.²⁰ In Giovio's day, it conveyed an expectation for portraiture that his own collection defied. His portraits did just the opposite, each one insisting that it was a painting and not the sitter incarnate. So too does Gentile's picture of Mehmed firmly remind us of its image-ness. Despite the precision of costume, beard, and jeweled textile, we are not for a moment fooled into thinking that the Sultan sits before us with only a thin marble arch keeping us from his royal presence. The flat, black background, surreal floating crowns, and inscription—claiming *I, Gentile, made this*—undermine any possibility of pure illusion.²¹ In fact, they signal a gap, a distance between us and the Sultan that was transcended by the artist's brush. They emphatically assert that this is not a face but a copy of a face.

But what of a copy of a portrait, which is, in effect, a copy of a copy? Many works in Giovio's collection, including in all likelihood his picture of Mehmed II, were copies after other works of art.²² He gathered these paintings through barter and gift, and often through written requests to other collectors or to the subjects themselves—his affiliation with the papal court served him well in this regard. Only rarely did he commission a portrait himself, and although he admired

Titian, he was not concerned with having a work by the artist's own hand. Aesthetics and quality were less important to Giovio than the picture's subject. He sought out copies of works that he considered significant and authoritative and that had a close connection to those models—preferably copies made directly from them and arriving straight from the source.²³ In Giovio's world, "likeness" was more like a chain of images than a reflection off a glass; the shorter the links in the chain and the fewer separating his version from the model, the truer was the picture in his collection.

His sultan portraits—he claims to have owned a series of eleven—may have been copies after a set of miniatures made at the Ottoman court that, through a turn of gift-giving and friendly loans, came into the collection of Cardinal Alessandro Farnese in Rome in the 1540s. This is a contorted history, involving the admiral of the Ottoman fleet and an Italian agent to the French king, Francis I. It centers on a finely worked box of ebony and ivory that contained, as Giovio puts it, "eleven true pictures of the Ottoman rulers, painted according to the local manner in fine color on a ground of smoothed paper" that the cardinal permitted him to have copied.²⁴ Giovio would have appreciated the pedigree of these miniatures as he searched for authoritative sources—what better than paintings made at the Ottoman court in Istanbul? He in turn proffered his pictures as models, with copies made for the Medici in Florence and the Hapsburgs of Austria. Of all these pictures, only a few survive—reproductions of Bayezid I in Florence and Mehmed II in Vienna, for example—and the network of connections they represent is maddeningly complicated.

With regard to Giovio's portrait of Mehmed, there are some significant contradictions in the collector's assertions: he claims simultaneously that it is a work by (or after) Gentile Bellini and a copy of an Ottoman miniature. Perhaps it was a hybrid. We do not know. But we can see a consistent theme in Giovio's rhetoric, namely a desire to associate each picture with a reliable model, one with a close relationship to the sitter—ideally via an eyewitness to that individual's physical form, or through a copy made directly from a similarly authoritative image.

It is the puzzle of the intermediary that draws me in and that binds Giovio's theories of authenticity to my historical project, the matter of how one disparate thing connects to another so to lead us, meaningfully, from point A to point B. Stimmer's woodcut in the *Elogia* is, at minimum, a copy (woodcut) of a copy (painted) of the face of the sitter—and, as we have seen, there are likely more links and even kinks in this particular representational chain. The relationship between Giovio's picture and the Sultan himself is much like our relationship to Gentile's portrait: we know there is a bridge between a historical image and the

present one, although the elements that comprise it may often elude our grasp. This distance is what time produces, leaving objects orphaned and without a clear trail back to their origins. It is also what history writing, in recreating a lost network of people, places, and things, seeks to overcome.

Lost in Venice?

The third historical trace, an echo taking us faintly but persuasively back to Gentile's absent portrait, comes not from Italy but from Istanbul itself, indeed from the Ottoman court where Gentile had resided and worked. In 1578, Sokollu Mehmed Pasha, grand vizier to the ruling sultan, Murad III, and a powerful courtier and prolific patron, asked Nicolò Barbarigo, the Venetian *bailo* (chief diplomat) in Istanbul, for assistance. Sokollu was sponsoring a new history of the Ottoman dynasty, from the founder Osman I through to his own day, but was onto something novel: he wanted this specially crafted book, the *Şema'ılname*, to be illustrated with a portrait of each sultan (Figures 4.3a–c and Plate 4).²⁵ The trouble was he lacked reliable models for the historic rulers, those whom living memory and testimonials could not reach. So he turned to Venice, apparently seen as a likely repository of reliable sources. Barbarigo took his request to the Venetian Senate and eventually procured a set of painted portraits for the Grand Vizier and his workshop (Figures 4.4a–c and Plate 5)—portraits that, in the end, do not seem to have made any impact on the book at all. Its sultanic images, by the court artist Nakkaş Osman, are direct heirs of Ottoman types. Questions abound: Why add portraits to an established formula? What sort of models were coveted? Why not actually use the Venetian works after going to so much trouble to get them? And why Venice? It is likely that Gentile's legendary trip to Istanbul and his renowned portrait were what drove Sokollu's quest.

The immediate evidence suggests otherwise. A more promising candidate for European influence is Giovio's *Elogia*.²⁶ Like Sokollu's own commission, it was a history told through biographies and had recently appeared in an illustrated edition. A book printed in multiple copies could circulate widely, across Europe to Istanbul and, as members of a worldly court involved in book production (although manuscript, not printed), Sokollu and his handpicked official historian, Seyyid Lokman, surely knew the *Elogia*. Giovio's sources would have appealed to the Ottomans: recall his claim that the sultanic portraits in Como were copied after Turkish miniatures produced in Istanbul and shipped west. Beyond that, Giovio's theories and methods sustained the new form of history writing that



Figures 4.3a–c Nakkaş Osman, *Portraits of Sultans* (Orhan, Bayezid I, and Mehmed II), in S. Lokman, *Şema'ilname*, 1579, TSMK. H.1563, fols 29a, 36a, and 43b, Topkapı Palace Museum, Istanbul. (Also see Plate 4.)

Sokollu was helping to develop in the *Şema'ilname*, the full title of which translates as *A Human Physiognomy Concerning the Personal Dispositions of the Ottomans*.²⁷ Among its premises was that the face reveals character, thus providing deep, focused insight into the unfolding of history.

In the *Şema'ilname*, portraits line up across the turning of pages—the book is a serial project, again like Giovio's treatise, and pictorial series have their own,

unique operations that are distinct from the workings of the singular portrait. Comparison is their driving force. We see one sultan, poised on cushions under a fictive architectural frame, and then we turn the page and encounter another, and the parallels and divergences between the images immediately rise to the surface. Striking in these depictions, at least to a modern eye, are the bright colors and distinctions of dress. Despite the professed title of the book, faces are less individualized, expressions blank and indecipherable. Their opacity seems to undermine the book's alleged project until we realize that here physiognomy (in the manner of Giovio) points to general qualities of rulership, not historical personages—so Mehmed II is described as leonine in both features (“the look of a lion”) and temperament (“[he] would never accept defeat under any circumstance”), apt characterizations for the conqueror of Constantinople.²⁸ In the march of these figures across the pages of the book, what the series most clearly conveys is continuity, stability, and certitude. To the reader—likely Murad III, possibly members of his court (several copies were made)—they manifest a secure dynasty.

The painted portraits sought and secured by Sokollu in Venice did not have any evident influence on those in the *Şema'ilname*. It is an irony, really, because the images Sokollu so determinedly sought there did not actually exist and had to be created, possibly in the workshop of the renowned painter Paolo Veronese (Figures 4.4a–c and Plate 5; compare with Figures 4.3a–c and Plate 4).²⁹ We can imagine the Venetian Senate, under pressure to satisfy its sometimes ally, sometimes nemesis, rushing to the best painter of the day, much as Gentile himself had been selected a century earlier as Mehmed's ambassador. But to what end? These Venetian canvases are worlds away from the formal portraits of the *Şema'ilname* and Giovio's *Elogia* woodcuts. Although they are life-size, independent oil paintings, they resemble snapshots, their subjects found in a casual moment of introspection. Tightly cropped to the bust, with only a flash of fabric illuminating their solemnity, they favor expression and intimacy over the hierarchies of the court. It is perplexing that so much effort was put into securing these pictures that were then set aside in favor of more traditional Ottoman forms.³⁰

Maybe this had to do with timelines: the book was done, or needed to be done soon, and there was no time to go back and redo the sultanic portraits. Maybe the imported portraits were simply touchstones, or a yardstick by which to gauge the adequacy of the Ottoman images by affirming key factual details without fretting over what another visual tradition might call “resemblance.” Sokollu's approach to reliability was data-driven, directed at assembling a rich font of information about the sultans: in clothing their figures, for example, his artists consulted not only



Figures 4.4a–c Circle of Paolo Veronese, *Portraits of Sultans* (Orhan, Bayezid I, and Mehmed II), 1578 or later, oil on canvas, bpk Bildagentur / Munich, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen / Art Resource, N.Y. (Also see Plate 5.)

pictures but actual textiles, including historical caftans and turbans customarily displayed on the cenotaphs of the deceased rulers.³¹ Much like Giovio, Sokollu aimed to get as close as possible to a physical source. In the case of human faces, this meant portraits produced during the subject's lifetime and at firsthand.

It is here that Gentile's portrait of Mehmed, or at least the recollection of it, comes into play. We have already seen Mehmed's fascination with Gentile's skills,

the stir of interest in his ability to transcribe the world in paint. This reputation surely lingered at the Ottoman court, particularly among literate, worldly patrons like Sokollu. Ambassador Barbarigo, Sokollu's negotiator in obtaining paintings from Venice, recognized this interest and also its limits, given that the images Sokollu believed to be in Venice did not actually exist. Barbarigo rather cynically told the Venetian Senate that the Grand Vizier would be satisfied "as long as the [portraits of the] two or three [sultans], who were known to some of those still living, were true to life."³² For the other sultans, those outside the scope of living memory, Barbarigo encouraged the Venetians to improvise, drawing a mnemonic line in the sand at Mehmed's reign. He was almost certainly thinking of Gentile, still renowned a century later for his travels, and was thus positioning the artist as a watershed figure who separated distant and unreliable recollection from documented, reproducible visual history. That Sokollu sought out full-scale oil paintings when he had easy access to Giovio's illustrated book suggests that one thing he was after was a trace of that miraculous painter from Venice. Unfortunately for the Grand Vizier, another Venetian—Veronese, or a member of his workshop—would have to be Gentile's surrogate.

The portraits sent from Venice to Istanbul pull us into the swirl of historical memory and the longing for what images can do. Sokollu wanted pictures with a pedigree of truthfulness, a window onto likenesses lost to the Ottomans but perhaps living on in a hidden corner of the Italian peninsula. How close could he get to this source of truth? How many links in the chain would get him there? This feels like Giovio's hunt for reliable sources. But it also mirrors our search for Gentile's portrait after the death of Mehmed, conducted through hints and rumors, approximations and analogies, circling around the source but never quite able to land it.

Until, in our case, it emerges out of the mist in Venice in the fall of 1865.

Self and Other

Excavating the Orientalist Imagination

It reads straight out of a Victorian novel. On a dank evening in 1865, an elegant British gentleman is climbing carefully into his sleek, black gondola. He is startled by a figure stepping out of the shadows, an old man with the resigned air of an aristocrat fallen from grace. With a tilt of his head, the figure gestures to an object clamped awkwardly under his right arm. It is a painting, and its dark surface glistens with moisture. “Twelve pounds, sir. *Signore. Solo dodici.* For the painting. *Bellini . . . Gentile Bellini.* You know him, yes? A good price, *vero?*” The old man moves smoothly between languages, nearly confounding them, as though one were the same as the other. He is, he explains, the son of an Englishman long resident in Venice, and the painting has been in his family for years. But as for so many people in this quietly fading city, his fortunes have shifted and his stash of beautiful things—perhaps even his family’s palace—now needs to be converted into cash. A quick sale is in order, and the gentleman is willing. His collection of Italian paintings is growing and if this is indeed a work by Gentile Bellini, well, it is surely worth taking a chance, at just twelve pounds.¹

This meeting was reported by the gentleman in question, Sir Austen Henry Layard, in a letter of October 1865 to his friend, the art critic Giovanni Morelli.² It is the first definitive reference to the picture that hangs today in the National Gallery, where Layard was soon to become a trustee. With this purchase, Gentile’s portrait enters a new chapter in its history, one tied to some of the key cultural tendencies of nineteenth-century Europe, including imperialism, Orientalism, and—in the world of museums—the related act of accumulating cultural riches from across the globe and displaying them to audiences in London, Paris, and other western capitals. Layard was a key player in these arenas. He served as the English ambassador to Constantinople (Istanbul),³ documented his travels in numerous lengthy publications, and excavated Assyrian treasures at Nineveh and Nimrud (today in Iraq) that he promptly sent home by the crate-load to the British Museum.

As far-ranging traveler, government envoy to the Ottoman capital, cultural rapporteur, and eventual resident of Venice, Layard also had a good deal in common with Gentile Bellini. Might he have recognized this parallel? He never tells us. But a journalist reporting on the occasion of his wife's death in 1912 put precisely such words into his mouth: "Although he only held [the] appointment [to the Embassy in Constantinople] for a short time, [Layard] often recalled it with interest when contemplating the 'Portrait of the Sultan Mohammed II,' by Gentile Bellini."⁴ The coincidence must have seemed particularly striking when he found himself meeting face-to-face with the reigning sultan, Abdülhamid II, during his tenure at the Ottoman court (1877–80). On retiring from this service in 1880, exactly 400 years after Gentile completed his picture and returned to Venice, Layard settled into a palace on the Grand Canal, the Ca' Cappello, recalled his painting collection from England where it had been on exhibit, and hung the portrait of Mehmed II prominently "in the first room that the visitor enters, [. . .] on the left wall by the window that looks out on to the Canal San Polo."⁵

Gentile's picture thus embodies a network of experiences, taking on new meanings under Layard's care and in the context of the various practices and persuasions he brought to it. One of my fundamental assumptions in investigating this network—and one reflected in Layard's own approach to ancient Assyria—is that interpretation is not a one-way street, not a linear journey from fact to explanation but a circuitous route weaving back and forth between subject and object. Reception theory, as developed in literary criticism, demands that we allow texts to signify differently in different contexts and accept meaning as contingent on audience.⁶ The Orientalist perspective probed in this chapter is not unrelated, in that it situates meaning in the act of looking rather than as pre-existent in the thing or person being observed.

In the pages that follow, I understand meaning to flow freely between subject and object, in this case between the collector and what he collected. I adopt the notion of "entanglement" to suggest a network of interrelated images and texts that speak variously to each other, breaking free of chronologies, cultural boundaries, and the artifices that insist on separating the rational from the imaginary.⁷ Although Gentile's portrait of Mehmed was one of Layard's favorite possessions, his personal responses to it, as with his collection as a whole, are terse.⁸ To get near it, we must consider its significance to Layard from many angles and in a thick cultural context, open to the divergent and unexpected ways the painting intersected with his larger world. In this circuit of interpretation, the portrait can bring us closer to Layard, just as Layard himself helps us to see the portrait more clearly.

“Journey into history”⁹

Perhaps it was his childhood discovery of the “preserved” body of a saint in a locked room of the family residence in Florence that spurred Layard’s archaeological career and his love of a quest.¹⁰ Certainly Florence nurtured his lifelong interest in art. Born in 1817 in Paris to a British family of French Protestant descent, Austen Henry Layard (né Henry Austen and known as Henry) spent his youth in Italy, his father’s delicate health having propelled the family south for the healing climate. His memoirs describe a happy, carefree childhood during which, encouraged by his parents, he immersed himself in the beauty that surrounded him. The Layards rented an “inexpensive” apartment on a lower floor of the Palazzo Rucellai, an impressive Renaissance structure designed by the famed architect-theorist Leon Battista Alberti, familiar to us for his role in the fifteenth-century discourse of naturalism. An altarpiece by Alberti’s renowned contemporary Fra’ Filippo Lippi hung at the foot of Henry Layard’s bed.

Layard studied pictures in galleries and, less successfully, painting with a local artist. He assisted his father, Henry Peter John, in building a collection of portraits of famous Renaissance men, akin to that of Paolo Giovio whom we encountered earlier. Rounding out the nineteenth-century obsession with collecting, his brother Edgar Leopold became a naturalist who, while under official employment in East Asia, shipped specimens of exotic butterflies and birds back to England. Young Henry Layard filled his head with fantastic stories and, as a somewhat older boy, tried to convert them into a historical romance of his own, featuring a knight in shining armor. It was the tales of *The Thousand and One Nights*, he later recounted, that “took me to the East, and led me to the discovery of the ruins of Nineveh.”¹¹

In this remark and others like it, there is fluidity between Layard’s imaginative life and his serious, hard-nosed experiences as a diplomat and explorer, an overlap that is useful to historians who might dismiss such confabulations as contrary to rock-steady “fact.” Take the portrait that serves as frontispiece to one of his many memoirs, *Early Adventures in Persia, Susiana, and Babylonia*, published in 1887 but recounting his very first trip east in the early 1840s (Figure 5.1).¹² Here Layard appears, youthful and bearded, wrapped in the robes and headdress of the Bakhtiyari people of western Persia. He spent several months with these tribes and writes enthusiastically about the assistance they gave him.¹³ The portrait of Layard in local dress signals this mutual embrace—not to mention a traveler’s need for fresh clothes and a bit of cultural camouflage in alien and potentially hostile territory.



Figure 5.1 Sir A. Henry Layard in Bakhtiyari Costume, frontispiece to Layard, *Early Adventures in Persia, Susiana, and Babylonia*, vol. 1 (London, 1887), The New York Public Library. Courtesy of the HathiTrust.

But a bearded, turbaned figure in richly ornamented robes also brings to mind another portrait, that of Sultan Mehmed II, which Layard had owned for over two decades when the costumed portrait of him was published. Those of us acquainted with Gentile Bellini and his journey will recall the painter's return to Venice in 1480, when he was said to have walked off the ship wearing a Phrygian cap and Ottoman medallions, ornaments that marked him as a traveler to exotic places and boosted his credibility as a witness to them. Having studied Gentile's biography, Layard knew this history, too; through personal experience at the Ottoman court and a romantic disposition, he was also positioned to identify with it. A conceptual fusion between Gentile-painter-diplomat and Layard-explorer-ambassador would have extended Layard's sympathy with the portrait

of Mehmed well beyond mere possession and rendered it a reminder of this relationship—just as our journalist-witness of 1912 indicated. Beyond that testimony, we must approach this fusion obliquely, since Layard does not set up these connections for us.

His own writings are helpful guides in understanding how he made sense of the past and its material remains. Accounts of his travels in the lands of Persia and ancient Mesopotamia, for example, regularly merge the archaeological with the ethnographic and political, leavening observation with personal assessment. Such overlays are not just a trace of what happened to cross his visual field and wind up in his notebooks but are characteristic of nineteenth-century approaches to so-called primitive cultures. Like most of his contemporaries, Layard believed that the people he was encountering in remote villages and among nomadic tribes were effectively one with the distant past he sought to understand through excavation.¹⁴ As he put it in the preface to his 1849 archaeological memoir, *Nineveh and Its Remains*:

[The present inhabitants] are, indeed, as much the remains of Nineveh, and Assyria, as are the rude heaps and ruined palaces. A comparison between the dwellers in the land as they are now, and as the monuments of their ancestors lead us to believe they once were, will not perhaps be without useful results.¹⁵

Millenia separated these modern “dwellers” from their Assyrian forebears, but for Layard the local people functioned like archaeological remnants, literal survivors of the ancient past existing in the present, ready to be described, cataloged, and interpreted by an explorer like himself. There is no rational science to this analysis. It is an intuitive approach to ethnography, based on anecdotal observations and a generalized notion—applied analogously by Europeans in Africa, the Americas, and much of Asia—that Mesopotamia’s modern inhabitants are the leftovers, degraded and worn down, of the great people who once occupied their land. This perspective was shaped by, and frequently inflected with, personal assessments that move rapidly from observation to condemnation, even when mingled with empathy. So of his Arab assistants on a dig, Layard wrote:

They soon felt as much interest as I did in the objects discovered, and worked with renewed ardour when their curiosity was excited by the appearance of a fresh sculpture. On such occasions they would strip themselves almost naked, throw the kerchief from their heads, and letting their matted hair stream in the wind, rush like madmen into the trenches, to carry off the baskets of earth, shouting, at the same time, the war cry of the tribe.¹⁶

This is a classic nineteenth-century Orientalist statement as that outlook was characterized by the cultural critic Edward Said in his landmark study of 1978, *Orientalism*.¹⁷ Said took what had been a general description for representations of the Middle East and related fields of study, “Orientalist,” and tied it to colonial structures of power and control: “Orientalism.” According to Said, Europeans reduced the complexity of these foreign territories to simple points of opposition, West set against East: complex and evolving versus simple and decaying; rational and logical versus superstitious and emotional; masculine and honorable versus feminine and corrupt. The former was, from this perspective, destined to dominate the latter.

Another key point for Said was that this oppositional framework regulated what Europeans saw in the “Orient” and how they described it. Even the perceptions of a fresh, open-minded observer—for Layard is often warm and generous in his descriptions of local people—were shaped by this analytical structure; there could be no innocent encounter. Orientalist theory posits all relevant European descriptions as being less about the observed than about the observers, about fulfilling their own expectations. This is not to dismiss such descriptions as inherently inaccurate, but to demand that any consideration of them take full account of the posture and presumptions of the viewing subject—in our case, Austen Henry Layard. Eventually, we will turn this reflective approach onto Layard and his relationship with Gentile’s portrait of Mehmed. For the moment, we are in and around Nineveh, where Layard first made his mark.

Layard embodied Orientalism. His work was, by its very nature, colonial and rooted in a practice of domination. As part of Queen Victoria’s diplomatic corps, he was thoroughly enmeshed in the imperial mission. Equally, his amateur archaeological practice—there were only amateurs at this point, the field just beginning to emerge and with no professional definition—depended on colonial power and might.¹⁸ The frontispiece to *Nineveh and Its Remains* is telling (Figure 5.2): here we see Layard commanding a crowd of native laborers from on high. His Western garb contrasts with local dress, his effortless gestures of command with the toil of those below him. Under Layard’s guidance, a team of Arabs removes an Assyrian winged bull so that it can be shipped to the British Museum in London. Quite literally, the British are taking cultural control.¹⁹

Assyria was the imaginative frontier of antiquity for educated Europeans of the nineteenth century, often pushing people, including Layard, into the realm of fantasy. In Said’s terms, Assyria was Other to the Other, alien even to what was already perceived as strange.²⁰ The classical traditions of Greece and Rome had been revered since the Renaissance. Egypt was exotic but increasingly familiar

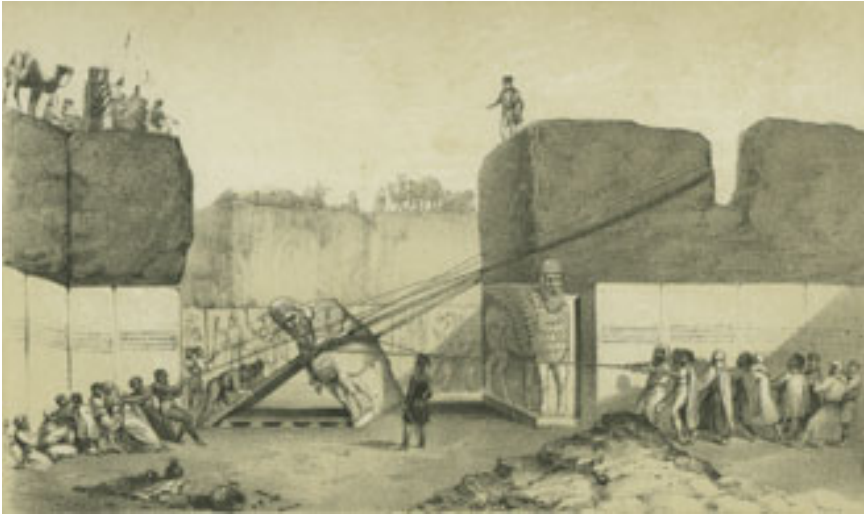


Figure 5.2 *Lowering the Great Winged Bull*, lithograph, frontispiece to Austen Henry Layard, *Nineveh and Its Remains* (London, 1849), The New York Public Library, Digital Collections.

thanks to French and British excavations of around 1800, again associated with their respective colonial advances in the region. But Assyria was largely unknown. Its terrain was not part of the Grand Tour, a circuit of the European continent taken by the British elite to further their historical knowledge and solidify their cultural credentials. Even as its remains were put on display in the museums of London and Paris, Assyrian aesthetics repelled those dedicated to the classical tradition; they were deemed disproportionate, unrefined, frankly gaudy—“rude and primitive,” in Layard’s own words.²¹ Greek history and the Bible, the primary textual sources for knowledge of ancient Assyria, reinforced these negative impressions not least because they were authored by the Assyrians’ traditional enemies.

Layard credits Sir Claudius James Rich of the East India Company, resident in Baghdad, with uncovering some of the first Assyrian fragments and transporting them to the British Museum. There they “formed the principal, [...] almost only, collection of Assyrian antiquities in Europe. A case scarcely three feet square enclosed all that remained, not only of the great city, Nineveh, but of Babylon itself!” Layard protests, clearly offended by this disproportionate gap in historical attention.²² Indeed, the unfamiliar, fragmentary traces of Assyria in Europe lent it the aura of a dream.²³ Layard was typical in attributing his early interest in Mesopotamia to a childhood love for *The Thousand and One Nights*.

So too was his imaginary fusion of Assyrian remains with a timeless Arabian place a common way of conceiving of the region: the Orient, for Orientalists, was exactly the way they wanted it to be. In this framework, intuitive, personal reactions to archaeological and other cultural objects stood easily alongside scholarly, documentary outlooks and could even take precedence over them.

Austen Henry Layard studied Assyrian objects and also lived with them. He gifted his wife, Lady Enid Layard, jewelry, including a necklace and earrings made of cylinder seals that he had excavated at Nineveh (Figure 5.3). He reports admiring something similar around the neck of Amsha, a sheik's wife, in the early 1840s: they “[made] a loud jingling sound as she walked”; “to the Arabs, she was perfection.”²⁴ Apparently Lady Enid did not care for these quirky



Figure 5.3 Vicente Palmaroli y Gonzales, *Lady Enid Layard*, 1870, oil on canvas, London. © The Trustees of the British Museum. The museum also owns this jewelry, museum number 105120.

archaeo-ethnographic ornaments and wore them only to please her husband.²⁵ At their home in the Ca' Cappello in Venice, marbles excavated by Layard "encrust[ed] the staircases."²⁶ Henry Layard surely found this framing innocuous, likely intending to elevate the ancient fragments to the status of art. From an Orientalist standpoint, however, such repurposing reads as an act of domestication that reduces the surviving traces of a lost society to a decorative gesture. It also underscores the flexible boundary between historical distance and creative imagination. Cesare Augusto Levi captured this fluidity in 1900 when he recalled seeing the Layard collection at a party, through "the glimmer of torchlight, the sparkle of gems, the flash of gold and silverware, among the hazy, darting figures of women, on unforgettable evenings among Venetian society."²⁷

Gentile's portrait of Sultan Mehmed II sits squarely within this intimate, imaginative relationship to art and history. Layard considered it his most remarkable possession and it "visibly occupied a place of honor" on an easel at the Ca' Cappello, as the diarist Henri de Régnier described it in 1906.²⁸ Like most visitors, de Régnier was captivated by the portrait, such that it distracted him from other nearby objects, including the array of "Hindu and Persian arms" that studded the walls. Many years later, a descendant of one of Lady Layard's associates recalled spending school holidays in Venice and having to shoo the family parrot away from the pictures.²⁹ Clearly, a visitor to the Ca' Cappello was not in a museum, arranged by period or place to the objectified tastes of a professional curator, but in a living space, alongside travel souvenirs, personal memorabilia, and the occasional pet bird.

Self and Other

It was in Istanbul, and more specifically at the Ottoman court, where Layard's imaginative relationship to Gentile and his portrait had the greatest space to flourish. Both men were immersed in this world and had direct, even intimate connections with the empire's highest authority. By the time he was appointed ambassador to the Ottomans in 1877, Layard had owned Gentile's painting for over a decade and was well acquainted with the story of the artist's travels from reading Giorgio Vasari, Carlo Ridolfi, and other early sources. Surely Layard noted the parallels with his own experience; likely he saw something of himself in Gentile as well. They were both avid chroniclers of their surroundings, Gentile in drawings and Layard also, although it is the colorful anecdotes dotting his memoirs that most enduringly capture and preserve his perspective.

Unfortunately, Layard's own journaling ceased around 1850, long before his ambassadorial posting.³⁰ Yet there are some tantalizingly relevant passages in his early publications, such as this description of Sultan Abdülmecid I, to whom he was presented by Sir Stratford Canning, then British ambassador, in 1849. Like so many theorists of physiognomy and students of portraiture before him, Layard reads temperament in appearance:

Sultan Abdülmecid was a kind-hearted, well-intentioned man, but constitutionally weak and feeble. His appearance agreed with his character. He was small in stature, and pale, and sat with downcast eyes: but the expression of his countenance, although melancholy, was amiable and benevolent, and when lighted up with a smile, which it frequently was when the conversation took a turn which pleased him, very attractive.³¹

In a chauvinistic statement typical of European observers, he adds that the Sultan “had the taint of madness which has existed in the family since Sultan İbrahim,” and attributes his obsession with cleanliness to this defect. He claims that Abdülmecid would, “in a kind of exaggerated horror,” throw a plate suspected of impurity out the window and banish any attendant with but a speck of dirt on his robes. This is a far cry from the casual beheading we have seen attributed to Mehmed II but falls into a similar, Orientalist construct of erratic and irrational Eastern ruler (see Chapter 3, Figure 3.1, notably, a nineteenth-century picture).

Lady Layard's diaries are our best window onto her husband's later ambassadorial tenure in Istanbul and his relationship with the reigning sultan, Abdülhamid II. She writes with excitement of meeting Abdülhamid just days after arriving in 1877, and of the elaborate entourage that brought them to his kiosk (pavilion) at Yıldız.³² This is one of many social encounters mentioned in the diary, including more trips to Yıldız, walks in the Sultan's gardens, and excursions in his boats and carriages. Although Lady Layard was entertained separately by Abdülhamid's mother and consort during official business, she was also on good terms with the Sultan and their friendship continued for many years, even after her husband's death. Abdülhamid sealed these relationships with gifts to the couple, including parrots, French beans, a diamond bracelet for her, and a fine, monogrammed watch, “a specimen of Turkish workmanship,” for him.³³ On one occasion, the Layards dined on a “mixture of Frankish & Turkish cooking,” seated beside Abdülhamid “in one of the recesses of the great hall with the 4 Sultans' portraits.”³⁴ Perhaps the face of Mehmed II was among them.

In some cases, these outings followed closely in Mehmed's own footsteps as, for example, when the Layards were taken to “the fortress built by the original

Turks who took Constantinople” and to “the apartment in it which is called Sultan Mahomed’s.”³⁵ One of the excursions most memorable for Lady Layard, and most suggestive for us, was a trip the couple took to the Baghdad Kiosk in the Old Seraglio (or Topkapı Palace, constructed by Mehmed), which included a private viewing of the Treasury—that highly protected, private space where Gentile’s picture was likely to have been stored, where he may have met with Sultan Mehmed and possibly even painted him. She writes:

At the door [of the Treasury] stood in a double row between 20 & 30 servants. The gentleman in charge rec[eive]d the keys & unlocked 2 doors & broke the Imperial seal wh[ich] is set on a cord over the lock & we entered a small room full of beautiful things. The first thing that strikes one is a kind of platform on legs or throne with a footstool of enamel & jewels of every sort & a gold cushion embroidered with pearls. It is of most lovely work. It was taken by Osman from Baghdad. Then there were trappings for horses[,] aigrettes for the Sultan all set in diamonds, & every kind of beautiful things—jade, crystal, china all jeweled & a gold prayer carpet worked with pearls and emeralds—an uncut emerald abt. ½ foot square—old clocks—armours &c &c. From here we went to the Royal Library where we had to put on slippers before entering—then to another kiosk wh[ich] used to be used by the Sultan to rest in after the ceremonies of Bairam & wh[ich] has a large kind of divan like a 4 poster wh[ich] takes up 1/2 the room. There we rested & were served with sherbet & coffee [...].³⁶

Gentile’s relationship with Mehmed was more formal, but he too was admitted into the inner sanctum of the Ottoman palace and enjoyed private audiences with the Sultan in its most protected spaces. Might the gold prayer carpet with pearls and emeralds described by Lady Layard be the source for the unusual tapestry in the foreground of his portrait?

We cannot be sure. Yet as our search for Austen Henry Layard’s relationship to this portrait leads into the duskiest corners of historical recollection, Layard himself offers helpful guidance for proceeding down this interpretive path. His own work makes ample use of grounded supposition and imaginative intervention in trying to understand the lost world of ancient Assyria. Our best introduction to his methodology and mindset is *The Monuments of Nineveh*, published in two series, 1849 and 1853, *From Drawings Made on the Spot*, according to the subtitle.³⁷ “On the spot” asserts visual authority as witness, recalling Gentile Bellini’s descriptive style and his reputation for reliability.

History and fantasy merge in images like the opening plate, *The Palaces of Nimroud Restored*, a color lithograph based on a sketch by James Fergusson (Plate 6). Behind a fertile field and a placid river dotted with elegant, dragon-headed boats

risers a wedding cake of a city, all colonnaded layers and shimmering shades of pink, blue, and green. This “restoration” attempts to present us with the city as it might have appeared in its own day (an approach often taken by nineteenth-century painting restorers, as we shall see). Fergusson’s source is the archaeological record that he animates with clusters of human figures, herds of animals, flowering plants, reflective water, and a shimmering, vibrant light. *Hall in Assyrian Temple or Palace, Restored* is likewise a picture of antiquity brought to life (Figure 5.4). The stage-like setting was inspired by the artifacts Layard had sent from Nineveh to London, while the king and his attendants may just as well have walked out of the surrounding bas-reliefs on which they were based.

The most fabulous “restorations” of this sort were those invented for the Assyrian Court of the Crystal Palace at Sydenham, a wondrous building reconstructed and enlarged after London’s Great Exhibition of 1851 to contain, among many other things, replicas of great civilizations and their monuments. Layard was a key advisor to Sydenham’s Assyrian Court and its fabrication was overseen by the illustrator James Fergusson, originator of the panoramic city image discussed above. The Sydenham installation consisted of three courts built on the general model of Assyrian architecture, with painted plaster copies



Figure 5.4 *Hall in Assyrian Palace Restored*, color lithograph, in Austen Henry Layard, *The Monuments of Nineveh*, 1st series (London, 1849), pl. 2, The New York Public Library, Digital Collections.

of large-scale and relief sculptures taken from works at the British Museum and the Louvre.³⁸

These replicas aside, the Assyrian Court demanded considerable creative intervention. Unlike the case of ancient Egypt, Greece, and Rome, with significant remains visible above ground, Assyrian excavations were few and had suffered significant erosion. “The [Assyrian Court] is a grand fiction, founded, however, on fact,” wrote Edward McDermott in his guidebook to Sydenham.³⁹ Layard concurred, explaining that the structural materials of the Assyrians—principally mud and straw—had not survived well,⁴⁰ and that the three courts were composites of what was known about the original architecture and ornament. The fragility of Assyrian artifacts haunts much of his writing, including justifiable concerns about damage that might occur in shipping and anxiety even at the point of excavation, simply with exposure to air.⁴¹ Here again is that void between what we know and what we must imagine, between the integrity of past monuments and their ruin in the present.

In the images that make up Layard’s *Monuments of Nineveh*, the principal artistic device allowing for such leaps of time and understanding is color. Plates documenting archaeological finds are typically monochromatic, while the lively, inhabited scenes of the “restored” cities and temples are vivid and varied in their chromatic range.⁴² In one unusual but revealing case, *Assyrian Rock Sculpture (Bavian)*, human figures in bright robes pop out against a neutral, uniform background (Plate 7). These are modern Arabs exploring a stone face carved by the ancients and modified at a later date, its arched openings identified in the accompanying text as tombs. Here color signals the living culture while a grisaille palette stands for antiquity, passively waiting to be discovered and interpreted. The juxtaposition is a device for entwining past and present, the dead and the living, what we can see with our eyes (excavations) and what we can evoke in our imaginations (reconstructions). It encourages viewers to wander between two domains that might seem absolutely distinct—the ancient Assyrian past and the nineteenth-century present—effortlessly and with creative abandon.

As a twenty-first-century viewer, my own relationship with Layard’s imagery is complicated by other visual contexts, and a brief detour into the modern imagination is worth taking for added perspective. I am familiar with the British Museum and its installations of Layard’s excavated monuments c. 2018 (Figure 5.5). When I look upon the picture of a hall in an Assyrian palace (Figure 5.4), I am immediately put in mind of the status of these objects today. I note how the British Museum loosely mimics the sculptures’ original placement in the ancient spaces that Layard and his followers excavated, flanking a passageway. And I am

drawn to two opposing yet complementary readings of these massive bearded beasts, one bull and one lion. They are part of an architectural structure, buttresses at a crossing in the building that connote permanence. At the same time, they are mismatched fragments bolted to the walls, obviously displaced artifacts—some would say spolia or trophies of empire (Figure 5.2). In the era of ISIS, I also recall similar statues, still *in situ*, being attacked by militants as evidence of past hedonism and threats to a modern Islamic state—and perhaps I consider the status of “trophies” a bit differently as a result.⁴³ As I look at Layard's image, I have the British Museum and this modern history firmly in mind.

My visual experiences and the network of meanings they set up are unique to me and grounded in my own time and place. They would have meant nothing to the ancient kings of Mesopotamia and only somewhat more to Layard. But this does not negate their importance to my own engagement with these materials. This is true for any image and for any viewer, including Austen Henry Layard. As a deeply curious individual with a rich cultural knowledge and varied takes on historical objects, he must have enjoyed the serendipitous relationships he found through objects across time and place. How could he have looked at the



Figure 5.5 Assyrian, *Winged Bull* (l.) and *Winged Lion* (r.), c. 865–860 BCE, carved stone, object numbers 118872 and 118873, Gallery 8, The British Museum, London. Photo © The author.

reproduction of an ancient relief carving of men *Drawing a Winged Bull to the Top of an Artificial Mound (Kouyunjik)* (Figure 5.6) and not thought of his own efforts to remove similar objects to the British Museum—an effort so important that it serves as frontispiece to *Nineveh and Its Remains* (Figure 5.2)? The artistic staging of the British excavation looks remarkably like the ancient relief, complete with a gesticulating commander elevated above the straining laborers and a forbidding, rocky frame.⁴⁴ The book includes several plates dedicated to this topic, including images of sculptures being righted and colossi being moved across land and water, a precis of Layard's own efforts to ship unwieldy treasures home to London.

The most persistent motif in the illustrations of Layard's books may be that of a regal Assyrian in profile, bearded and sporting distinctive headgear—a hat, turban, or some combination of the two. In the *Discovery of the Gigantic Head*, a bearded Arab wearing the traditional *keffiyeh* of desert peoples goes nose-to-nose with a massive carving that has just been liberated from the surrounding rock at Nimrud near Nineveh (Figure 5.7). An Orientalist reading of this image underscores two things: the naive amazement of local peoples at the discovery (seen in the wild, even worshipful gesture of the figure at left⁴⁵), and the continuity between the ancient Assyrian, wrought of stone, and the modern man who



Figure 5.6 *Drawing a Winged Bull to the Top of an Artificial Mound (Kouyunjik)*, detail, in Austen Henry Layard, *The Monuments of Nineveh*, 2nd series (London, 1853), pl. 15, The New York Public Library, Digital Collections.



Figure 5.7 James H. Richardson, *Discovery of the Gigantic Head*, wood engraving, in Austen Henry Layard, *Nineveh and Its Remains*, vol. 1 (London, 1849), p. 73, The New York Public Library, Digital Collections.

examines him. In this face-off, past folds seamlessly into present, the local Arab made level with the rubble of history.

The bearded, turbaned profile that Layard came to know best was Gentile's portrait of Mehmed II. It is true that he did not obtain the portrait—indeed, did not know it still existed—until 1865, well after he had excavated in Mesopotamia and overseen the publication of these plates. But we have seen that the dialogue among images does not obey strict chronologies or linear trajectories. We know Layard associated his own journeys east with those of Gentile, and it is easy to imagine him making similar associations across imagery, from a portrait on canvas to a carving in stone. *The King and Sacrificial Altar (Nimroud)* offers the most evocative comparison (Figure 5.8). Not only does this figure share some key qualities with Gentile's *Sultan*—the beard, the tiered headgear, the face turned to our left—but so does its frame. Both men are placed within a semi-circular niche, one carved and one painted. Gentile blends oils to imitate carved



Figure 5.8 *The King and Sacrificial Altar (Nimroud)*, in Austen Henry Layard, *The Monuments of Nineveh*, 2nd series (London, 1853), pl. 4, New York Public Library Digital Collections.

marble, much as Layard's engraver reminds us of rock by detailing erosion and cracks. Above each figure, a set of emblems floats against a neutral background, crowns for Mehmed and magical symbols for the Assyrian king. One man sits behind a tapestry-draped ledge, the other stands behind a sacrificial altar, devices that distance us from the regal subject while suggesting physicality and presence. There are many differences between the two images, to be sure. But when set side by side, their powerful visual resemblances transcend time and place, as well as the traditional writing of history.

This Assyrian carving and the constellation of imagery related to it offer another way of thinking through Layard's engagement with Gentile's portrait. As Said indicates, nineteenth-century Orientalists, more than representing the Other, were representing themselves through that Other. This was not a conscious act, but an outcome of circumstance and broader cultural perspective—as are our own views back over this very era, when modern warfare encroaches on

archaeological history.⁴⁶ We can face Layard's relationship with Gentile's portrait in the same way, embracing the layers of meaning he may have brought to it, even if subconsciously and unvoiced. Of course the immediate subject of the portrait is a fifteenth-century sultan and its maker was a Renaissance painter; but the complexity of the experiences it embodies—of exotic travels, diplomatic encounters, witnessing, and testimonials—sound strikingly like those of Layard. How could this nineteenth-century English archaeologist and collector, this Orientalist servant of imperial Britain, not have colonized Gentile's portrait as well, making it over as kin to his own personal history? If meaning is bilateral, embodied not just in an image but in those who interpret it, we can see Gentile Bellini's portrait of Mehmed II reflecting back the figure of Austen Henry Layard himself.

Constructing Authenticity

Restoration, Provenance, and Reproduction

“But he got the wrong Bellini, didn’t he?” So one art history colleague responded when I told him about Austen Henry Layard’s acquisition of Gentile Bellini’s portrait of Mehmed II. It is a fairly common reaction among contemporary experts, who continue to see Gentile’s younger brother Giovanni as the true flower of the Venetian Renaissance, the one whose work pushed forward rather than looking back, stylistically speaking. Nineteenth-century tastes were more forgiving, and Layard would have certainly disagreed with my colleague’s assessment. He considered Gentile’s portrait of Mehmed one of his finest possessions, “a treasure” among the many pictures he owned.¹

Layard also harbored some uncertainties about the portrait he had purchased on that shadowy night in Venice—not about the wrong brother, but about the wrong canvas. Was his picture the same one Gentile had painted deep inside the precincts of the Ottoman court, and how could he be sure? Its path out of Istanbul had been lost, and by 1865 was little more than a faint trail of conjecture—yet there the portrait seemed to be, hanging on the wall of his home, first in London and later in Venice.² Layard combatted his insecurities with several tools of the collector’s trade: restoration, provenance and attribution research, and a publication campaign aimed at staunching any doubts about the picture’s quality and bolstering its fame.

At the heart of the matter lay the question of authenticity, and this question has continued to haunt the Sultan portrait to the present day. The “authentic” is most basically defined as something genuine and of undisputed origin, yet this is a complicated notion in the world of art and art history (and beyond). Authenticity encompasses matters of authorship—whether or not this is actually the work Gentile Bellini painted—but also more philosophical questions about an object’s history and its afterlife. A heavily restored picture like the London portrait can flip the authenticity question on its head. Even if this is, in fact, the

canvas that Gentile Bellini worked on in Istanbul, has damage and its extensive repainting fundamentally altered that identity? Is it still fair to consider this a work “by Gentile Bellini”?

Twenty-first-century answers to these questions differ from those that Layard and his contemporaries would likely have given. But a comparison of these perspectives reveals a great deal, not just about the history of one portrait but about the very instability of art objects that, in the safe, scientific space of scholarship, we may deem stable and clearly defined. Restoration or conservation, publication, and reproduction, along with presentation and display, are the lenses that filter and define our view of historical objects in the present. They shape taste and the hierarchies of the artistic canon, promoting and demoting individual works as more or less worthy. Layard fought harder for the reputation of his Sultan portrait than for any other work in his collection—revealing its problematic status from the moment of rediscovery.

Caring for pictures

Gentile's Mehmed was just one work in Layard's collection; he also owned paintings attributed to Giovanni Bellini, Vittore Carpaccio, Dosso Dossi, Cosmè Tura, Sebastiano del Piombo, Domenico Moroni, and others.³ As the collection grew, primarily during trips to Italy in the later 1850s and early 1860s, so did Layard's acquaintance with some of the major experts on Italian Renaissance art. Key among these was Giovanni Morelli, the art critic and politician best known today for his analytic approach to connoisseurship and attribution.⁴ Morelli's diagnostic methods, wherein minute distinctions of style were treated as clues to the definitive identification of the artist—much like fingerprints leading to a thief—were doubted by some contemporaries, as were his conclusions.⁵ Contradicting received wisdom about pictures and their histories, he made enough enemies through reattribution to warrant publishing his treatise on Italian paintings in German collections under the anagrammatic Russian pseudonym of Ivan Lermolieff. It was Layard who finally convinced Morelli to publish under his own name. The two men were active correspondents and Layard relied heavily on Morelli for his education in Italian painting.

Layard and Morelli struck up their friendship in the restoration workshop of Giuseppe Molteni, director of the famed Brera Gallery in Milan. Many collectors, mostly notably the English, visited the workshop, seeking advice on pictures and the touch-ups that would render them acceptable for presentation. Among

Molteni's clients was Sir Charles Eastlake, named director of the National Gallery in London in 1855. Ten years later, at Eastlake's death, Layard had achieved enough success to be offered the Gallery directorship; he declined in order to focus on politics, opting instead for a place on the board of trustees. Congratulating Layard on this appointment, Morelli also lamented the lack of such opportunities for "men of culture" in Italy. In true Orientalist fashion, his greatest insult was to decry Italian institutions as "very close to [those of] the Turks."⁶

The attitudes of Morelli, Molteni, and their contemporaries toward painting conservation are a critical chapter in our story. Their approaches were bold and often radical, shaped in large part by the art market and the taste of collectors.⁷ Language is telling: conservation, today's preferred term, emphasizes respect for the state of the object across time, while restoration suggests taking something back to its original form (a problematic goal) or even improving it.⁸ Conservators typically favor slowing damage and removing treatments considered deceptive or untrue to the historical artwork—often the very same treatments that were undertaken in nineteenth-century workshops. Although widely embraced, intensive restoration practices worried some,⁹ including one contemporary critic who warned Layard not to trust the "damned [*maledetta*] class of Venetian restorers, who have destroyed more than time itself," recommending him instead to a friend in Milan.¹⁰ It was there that Layard sent most of his paintings for treatment, although the Milanese themselves were not particularly gentle.

As a rule, these restorers sought to make a picture match their own idealized notion of its appearance. Not content with removing grime, they also modified compositions, adjusted colors, and corrected figures considered ill-proportioned. Sometimes "a little patina" was added in the form of a darker varnish to simulate age or make up for an earlier overcleaning.¹¹ Layard's collection was not spared this heavy hand. Checking in on the Englishman's behalf, Morelli reported that, although Molteni "finds your little Moroni [portrait] very beautiful," he thought it had room for improvement. "Consequently we have decided that [Molteni] must not only correct this young man's body, which seems to be bandaged in swaddling clothes, but must also join a piece of canvas three fingers long to the top of the picture to give it correct proportions."¹² "Correct" does not mean true to Moroni's original; it is an aesthetic judgment made by the restorer Molteni himself.

Layard's opinion about the condition of Gentile's *Sultan* and what to do with it developed over time, and quite rapidly.¹³ His first assessment, voiced in his 1865 letter of discovery to Morelli, was tepid. "Unfortunately the head is in a deplorable state and I doubt whether it can be restored without repainting it," he

wrote, although he was more optimistic about the framing details, particularly the jeweled tapestry. Several months after this initial report, Layard took a more positive tone with Morelli: "The portrait of Sultan Mehmet by Gentile Bellini will be a marvel. It is much better preserved than I believed. The inscription, with a date of 1480, and with what I believe is the name of the painter, seem perfectly preserved." Another month passed and he was even more enthusiastic: "The details are of a wondrous refinement not even Mantegna was able to match," he brags through comparison with one of the greatest fifteenth-century masters.¹⁴ Twenty-five years later, now working as an amateur scholar, Layard passed on an earlier description praising the picture as a "specimen of exquisite and almost indestructible finish."¹⁵ One cannot help but wonder: did the authors mean "indescribable"? Given Layard's earlier concern over the picture's "suffering," it seems an odd use of adjectives.¹⁶ Toward the end of his life, Layard censored criticism of restoration that some scholars considered excessive and for which they held him accountable. He pressured the publisher of Joseph Archer Crowe and Giovanni Battista Cavalcaselle's *History of Painting in North Italy* (1871) to describe the Sultan's fur collar as "restored" rather than "entirely new."¹⁷

Without doubt, the portrait of Mehmed has undergone significant treatment, much of it on Layard's watch. He sent it off nearly immediately, likely in the winter of 1865–6, to the studio of Raffaele Pinti, one of the principal restorers for the National Gallery based in London (the sequence and dating of his frequent letters to Giovanni Morelli indicate Layard returned to London shortly after buying the picture in October 1865 and brought it with him—a sign of the importance he gave it).¹⁸ A year later, in February 1867, Layard mailed Morelli a photograph of the portrait to show it off in its renewed state.¹⁹ The picture was also relined (that is, stabilized through the adhesion of another canvas on its reverse, a process that can also alter the painted surface), and photographic comparisons point to another intervention sometime between 1888 and its deposit at the National Gallery in 1916.²⁰ Shortly after, the Gallery "refreshed" its varnish, but since then no further work has been done.²¹ Today conservators shy away from working on very delicate or highly damaged objects to avoid further harm, hence the lack of intervention in recent years.

In 1997, based on X-ray examinations, conservator David Bomford described Layard's treatment as a complete recreation of Gentile's work (Figure 6.1). "The original painting is a ruin," he declared, "with large pieces of canvas missing and much of the paint flaked away."²² It is generally agreed that very little and possibly none of the existing surface of the London portrait was made by the hand of Gentile Bellini. But opinions have recently softened. National Gallery Curator

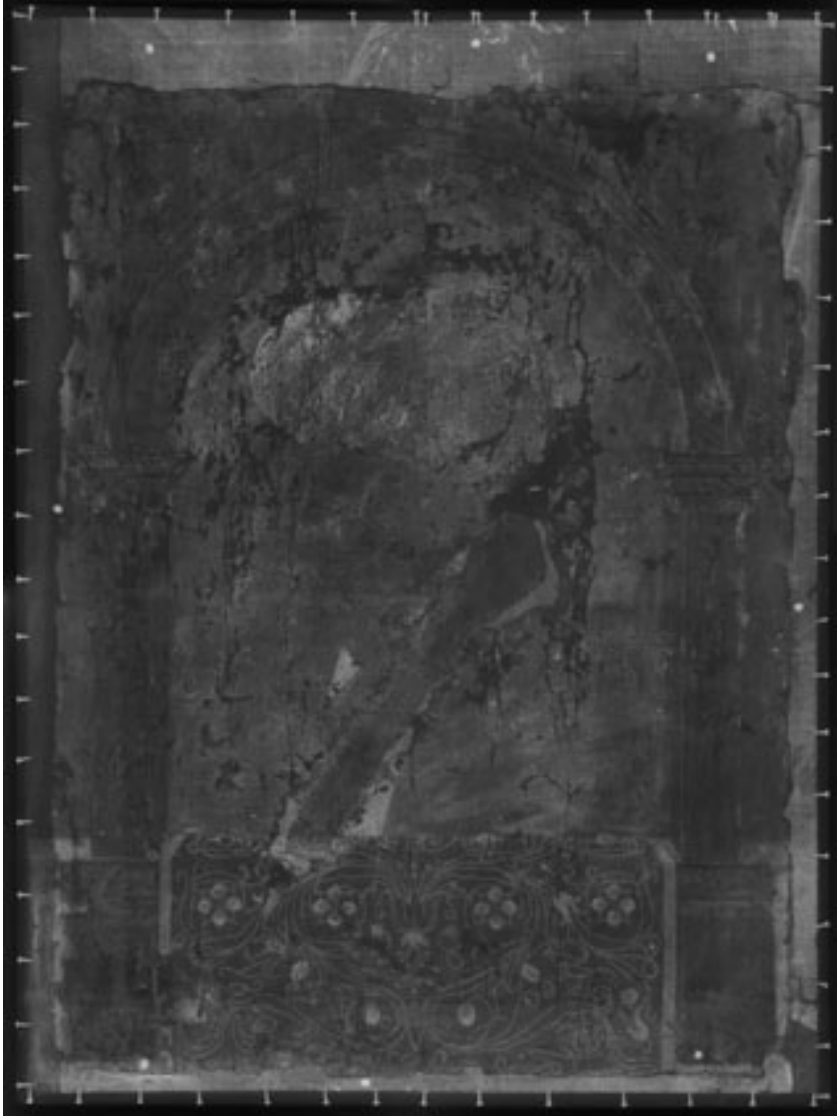


Figure 6.1 Conservation (X-ray) image of Gentile Bellini, *Portrait of Sultan Mehmed II*. © The National Gallery, London. Layard Bequest, 1916.

Caroline Campbell, writing for a 2005 exhibition, asserted that: “much more of the portrait painted on 25 November 1480 survives than has sometimes been supposed”; it is likely that the overall composition and many of its details are by Gentile.²³ Layard himself reported that, on restoration, a later inscription had been removed, revealing the original one that “appeared in almost a perfect state, only a

few words having been almost obliterated.”²⁴ Modern X-rays support this view, and even skeptics like Bomford agree that the object itself—that owned by the National Gallery—is the same one that Gentile labored on in the presence of the Sultan.

The history of a painting's condition has interesting ramifications, none of them insignificant. On the one hand, there is the simple but all-important matter of attribution: it is difficult to make assessments about the original appearance of a highly damaged surface and thus about the hand that painted it, even when comparing it with more pristine works by the same artist. Indeed, the London portrait has at various times been given to and then taken away from Gentile Bellini. Crowe and Cavalcaselle's survey of 1871 described it as an “injured piece” but did not waver in its attribution to Gentile.²⁵ By 1961, however, Martin Davies, director of the National Gallery, was only willing to affirm that the work included the names of Gentile Bellini and Mehmed II on its surface. He was doubtful that an attribution could be made, dismissing the “worthless evidence” of Gentile's authorship and declaring the canvas far too damaged to permit stylistic comparisons.²⁶ Official opinions at the National Gallery over its status as original or copy have vacillated over time. For the moment, the museum gives the picture firmly to Gentile Bellini.²⁷

More intriguing than the problem of attribution is the philosophical matter of the point at which a work of art—even if known to originate from the painter in question—is no longer of that painter's hand. That is, a painting *by* Gentile Bellini might not rightfully be considered “a Gentile Bellini” because so little of its original fabrication remains. Ironically, Layard himself said as much when criticizing “the fatal process of ‘restoration’” that, particularly in Italy, resulted in historic pictures that were more the work of the “official restorers [. . .] than that of the master.”²⁸ Repeated, heavy interventions demand that we reconsider how we talk about a painting, including not only its authorship but its entire history and even its essence. This is an inconvenient truth that art historians generally ignore. Its challenges compound when we recognize that the most renowned art historical works are the most likely to receive repeated and extensive treatments, meaning that those great pictures we all know and admire as “a Leonardo” or “a Titian” may not be that at all, or just barely.²⁹

We can flip this matter over and also see it from the other side. Perhaps the scars that a work bears are best considered part of its material history, part of what makes it the painting we have today even if they have nothing to do with the originating painter. There is little challenge on this front in the world of sculpture. We readily accept the Venus de Milo without limbs and would be horrified by any form of prosthetic. This was not always the case, although the

progression of attitudes toward sculptural reconstructions is far from linear. Just as Michelangelo admired and emulated the fragmentary Belvedere Torso, many Renaissance and Baroque collectors eagerly glued orphaned limbs onto broken statuary, creating chimeras that restorers are still sorting out. Stimulated in part by the Parthenon Marbles, brought in pieces to London by Lord Elgin in the early nineteenth century and venerated as one of the world's masterpieces, and in part by an anti-industrial sentiment that romanticized ancient ruins as the triumph of great art over the passing of time, by Layard's day most connoisseurs embraced the sculptural fragment as an aesthetic entity in its own right.³⁰

There was little such tolerance for a damaged painting, then as now. Particularly in the case of illusionistic imagery, the picture is apparently everything, as though it could be removed from its material surface and floated alone, like a digital projection. From an aesthetic perspective and even a technological one, this attitude is understandable, given how we come to know and study the history of art—once beholden to slides, now to PowerPoint. We might better think of a painting not as an image but as an artifact, a three-dimensional assemblage of armature, canvas, paint, varnish, and even grime, with all of its historical experiences coming to bear on it, physically.³¹ In cases of deliberate, targeted vandalism, these histories are relatively easy to fold into our understanding of an object—for example, when iconoclasts scrape out the eyes of an image or overpaint a face in order to wipe out an offensive act of representation, something that has occurred not infrequently in the history of both Christian and Islamic art.³² One scholar suggests that Gentile's canvas may have been similarly targeted, given the relative damage to the Sultan's face as compared to his surroundings.³³ Might the picture have been labeled heretical on Bayezid II's watch, the offending image scrubbed down to its bare foundations?

Most cases of damage are less extreme and not readily identifiable, the compounded effects of age and environment expressed in warped supports and buckled canvases, crackled paint and yellowed varnish. Yet even these seemingly mundane alterations signal an object's passage through time, the residue of demands on it and desires for it, evidence that it was wanted here, handled there, transported somewhere else. From this perspective, an artwork is permitted to change and, as with a living organism, change is a significant part of its essence. In the erosion to and interventions on our portrait's original surface—"patina" is the kinder term—we might read a history of peregrination and movement, of a work that has traveled a great deal and not always in easy conditions.

How do these realizations impact the way we think about the London portrait? We must acknowledge that we are considering two different things: an

idea of the picture Gentile Bellini produced and the actual object that has come down to us today. Too often, art history, particularly the history of painting, confounds these as one and the same—for this circumstance is not unique to Gentile's portrait but true of most artworks of any age or background. We must figure out how to accept and work with this duality. Keeping the story of an object's condition and restoration front and center, not hiding behind it or relegating it to a footnote, is a first step and, ironically, the damaged state of the London picture may help us along. The "suffering" it evinces invites us to think more closely about where it has been; timeless surfaces, polished and perfect, do not. They may be more deceptive than the most damaged of pictures.

Provenance, reproduction, and renown

Layard preferred to ignore these matters altogether, buffing up the condition of Gentile's portrait as well as its history and reputation whenever he got the chance. In addition to his role as collector and trustee, Layard was an accomplished scholar of Italian Renaissance painting, a passion nurtured as a child and fully realized in adulthood. He published occasionally in the *Quarterly Review*, made documentary sketches of frescoes that were exhibited by the Arundel Society,³⁴ and updated the sixth edition of the influential *Handbook of the History of Painting* by Franz Theodor Kugler (1891). In the introduction, penned in Venice, he explains his motives. The *Handbook* (1837) had been translated from German into English by National Gallery director Charles Eastlake (1851) and updated by Lady Eastlake (1874), but Layard believed that the new, scientific work of his friend Giovanni Morelli should be brought to bear on this earlier narrative. He has "caused a revolution in the history of Italian painting," explains Layard. Morelli's writings prompted not only the reattribution of individual pictures but also a more insistent arrangement of the history of art—and hence the *Handbook*—by regional school (Veronese, Paduan, Ferrarese, and so forth).³⁵ Regionalism led to art historical narratives structured around localized sites of production. It also supported emerging concepts of cultural patrimony, a matter that involved Morelli and, as we will see in the next chapter, played out significantly around Gentile's portrait of the Sultan.

Layard published extensively on works in his own collection—using the opportunity to research them and, not infrequently, to celebrate their attribution (authorship) and provenance (history of ownership, which often supports attribution). Today, such self-promotional practice is considered tainted by

conflict of interest, the monetary value of a picture rising along with its reputation. Modern research demands greater transparency and a more objective accounting of sources.³⁶ For Layard and his contemporaries, however, tending to the reputation of a picture was part of the responsibility of ownership, and Layard used his update of Kugler's *Handbook* to burnish the reputation of works in his collection, including Gentile's *Sultan*. His 1891 edition pays the portrait considerably greater attention than Lady Eastlake's did in 1874, when she included just a few brief sentences of description. Layard is more ambitious: "It appears, at one time, to have been in the collection of portraits of remarkable men made by the celebrated Italian historian, Paolo Giovio," he declares without evidence.³⁷ By conflating Giovio's picture with his own, Layard discounted the possibility of another, lesser history, such as one that placed his version in the possession of the Zen family in Venice.³⁸

Layard did have some competition for authenticity among a mysterious cohort of related images. In 1859, the late Lord Northwick's collection of paintings was auctioned off in Cheltenham, England. Entry number 1539 is described as:

Mahomet the Second in a red dress, wearing a turban, his right hand resting on the hilt of his dagger. A rare and highly interesting portrait. Painted at Constantinople, A.D. 1458, by Bellini, who was sent from Venice for that purpose.³⁹

The dating is problematic (Gentile went to Istanbul in 1479) and the picture unlikely to be by Gentile, but it may well be the one that hung in Venice with the Zen—that tradition is corroborated by an 1830 report of the transfer of the Zen picture to England five years previous.⁴⁰ Northwick's *Mahomet the Second* was among the paintings "bought in" by his heirs, not sold but instead kept in the family and passed down as part of what became known as the Spencer-Churchill Collection, in turn auctioned off by Christie's in 1965. Item 25 in the later sale closely matches the Northwick description of 1859 and is identified as a portrait on panel of Prince Djem (or Cem), Mehmed II's third son and once a pretender to the Ottoman throne.⁴¹ The trail of Northwick's painting has since gone cold, although another, closer cousin to the London picture was sold in 2007 to the new Museum of Islamic Art in Doha, Qatar (Figure 6.2). This is a small portrait, painted on panel, likely in the early sixteenth century. From the lineaments of the subject's face to the six crowns floating against a black field, the Doha portrait bears a clear relationship to the London picture—which Sotheby's calls the "prototype." Its history and provenance, however, are murky.⁴²



Figure 6.2 After Gentile Bellini, *Portrait of Sultan Mehmed II*, early 16th century, oil on panel, The Museum of Islamic Art, Doha, MIA PA.10.2007.

Although it is not clear which of these images Layard knew, early copies of Gentile's picture presented Layard with a dilemma. On the one hand, they competed with his assertion of provenance and authenticity—that it was his picture that had been produced in Istanbul and journeyed to Italy sometime soon after 1480. On the other hand, kindred images validated the importance of that original picture, asserting its renown and assuring a place for it in the history of art. The copy, as we have already seen in the case of Paolo Giovio, could be a hallmark of a certain kind of authenticity, a link to the subject through a chain of replicas and thus reliable as a likeness. But copies could also be marks of authority, that an image was significant enough to be duplicated—to have the status of the prototype. Gentile had participated in the dissemination of his own work by designing a copy to be cast in metal (Chapter 2, Figure 2.10) and Layard made much of this, both in his edition of Kugler's *Handbook* and in his presentation of the painting. At one point, perhaps during its earliest sojourn in

London in the 1870s, Layard gave it a modern frame that was embellished with a medal, “an electroplate of the one struck at Venice from dies made after this picture [. . .].” Unfortunately, this frame has long since disappeared.⁴³

Nineteenth- and twentieth-century technologies add a new twist to the matter of the copy. In Giovio’s world, copies were relatively rare and mostly painted, although printed copies like that by Tobias Stimmer were quickly making inroads (Chapter 4, Figure 4.2). By the late nineteenth century, such copies, technically termed “reproductive prints,” were much more numerous and varied, taking on a different relationship with their source.⁴⁴ Their main function was now art historical, to circulate knowledge not of the subject but of the image itself. These reproductions have a skewed relationship with the original, as is apparent in Layard’s edition of Kugler’s *Handbook*. His discussion of Gentile’s *Sultan* directs us to the facing woodcut (duly noted in the caption as “in the possession of A.H. Layard”) while offering a lyrical description of the portrait’s surface: “The head is painted with great delicacy,” we are told, although the woodcut reveals no such thing (Figure 6.3). We are expected to extrapolate from the woodcut we can see to the painting we cannot. Despite this mismatch, printed reproductions helped secure the picture’s identity. They also shifted the terms by which attributions were made and authenticity guaranteed. In some ways, the woodcut, transmitted from edition to edition, became the “true” picture, particularly for those who had access to the *Handbook* but little chance of seeing the portrait in the (painted) flesh. This is the image they would refer back to in confirming the authenticity of Gentile’s original.

Photography complicates this relationship even further, multiplying the rate by which the painting was reproduced and transmitted while eventually allowing for more precise representations of color, surface detail, and even hidden layers of its fabrication. In 1914, the National Gallery reported having no photos of the Layard collection, yet the Layards themselves were early adopters of this new technology, using it to share their pictures and information about them with others.⁴⁵ In 1866, Austen Henry Layard buoyantly promised to send a photograph of the Sultan portrait to Giovanni Morelli as soon as it was cleaned.⁴⁶ Enid Layard, who herself made at least two copies of the painting in watercolor, also took advantage of the photographic medium, sharing Gentile’s image with, for example, the mother of the khedive, the Turkish viceroy to Egypt, in 1912.⁴⁷ The first published photographs of it appeared in the mid-1880s, as the frontispiece to a multi-volume book on medals and to a lengthy study of Gentile’s voyage to the Ottoman court by the French scholar Louis Thuasne.⁴⁸ Layard and Thuasne exchanged enthusiastic letters about the picture, disagreeing over the ties to Giovio but equally convinced of its attribution. They both lamented the poor



Figure 6.3 After Gentile Bellini, *Portrait of Sultan Mehmed II*, woodcut, in Franz Theodor Kugler, *Handbook of the History of Painting*, 6th edn, ed. A. H. Layard (London, 1891), p. 304, Columbia University Libraries. Courtesy of the HathiTrust.

quality of published reproductions and the limited power of the photograph: nothing “gives a correct or satisfactory reproduction of the original,” opined Layard, inviting the Frenchman to come see Gentile’s work in person.⁴⁹

Today photographic replicas are ubiquitous and often of exceptional quality—in true color and at a level of resolution surpassing the visual capacity of the human eye. New techniques permit new kinds of viewing, beneath the surface of a picture to its underlying structure, its composition, and the layers of restoration and varnish that have been added to it. Photography across the spectrum, including

sophisticated permutations of infrared reflectography, allow us to dig down into the history of a picture, to see how its surface was built up by the artist and where it was later reworked. It is a tool of optical archaeology that provides new answers and opens up new questions. X-rays, which have been used by conservators for over a century, confirm much of what had already been understood about Gentile's canvas: it is highly damaged and most of the original paint has been lost. But the picture's basic outlines are accurate (does that make the woodcut the truest trace of Gentile's work?) and even certain details, like the recreated inscription, can be re-confirmed as authentic—or very likely so. Conservation imaging, like so many things we place in the realm of science, appears to offer up the truth, but its interpretation still relies on a leap of faith.

Mirror images

Hanging today in the Dolmabahçe Palace in Istanbul is a canvas that fully qualifies, to quote my art historian colleague, as “the wrong Bellini.” This is the reproduction of Gentile's portrait painted in 1907 by another Italian at the Ottoman court, Fausto Zonaro (Plate 8). It puzzled and frustrated me as I pursued Gentile's canvas in and around contemporary Turkey, popping up where the earlier picture should have been, taking its place in newspaper and magazine articles, on merchandise, and in popular culture. It is unclear if this has to do with copyright restrictions on the London picture (possible in the commercial sphere but unlikely for journalists or rogue meme-ers), ignorance of the history of these paintings, indifference to their relationship, or, most likely, all of the above. On more measured reflection, the unstable identity of Gentile/Zonaro's image perfectly sums up the many complexities of reproduction, reputation, and authenticity we have been considering here.

Zonaro hailed from Masi, near Venice, and was an entrepreneurial type, making his way to Istanbul with his equally enterprising wife, the photographer Elisa Pante Zonaro, and by 1896 winding up in the official employ of Sultan Abdülhamid II as *Ressam-ı Hazret-i Şehriyari* (Court Painter). He was awarded property and medals by the Sultan and painted portraits of his family members, even venturing into the harem, safely escorted by Elisa, to sketch one of the royal daughters.⁵⁰ The parallels between Fausto Zonaro and Gentile Bellini were not unremarked, and as intimates of Abdülhamid, the Zonaros' trail also intersected with that of the Layards—indeed, like Elisa Zonaro, Lady Layard played a key, underacknowledged role in her husband's success. One writer traced Fausto

Zonaro's personal history back to Byzantium, declaring that he had a "hereditary longing" for Istanbul.⁵¹

Building on his good relationship with the Sultan, Zonaro took a bold step: he requested permission to paint Abdülhamid's portrait. The artist reports the occasion in his memoirs, explaining his distress at seeing posters for sale on the Galata Bridge in celebration of the July 1908 restoration of the constitutional monarchy.⁵² They "supposedly depict[ed] Sultan Abdülhamid. I could not believe my eyes," he laments. "I bought one of those strange pictures. When I returned home, I felt as though I had been insulted. [. . .] An idea had been born."⁵³ Zonaro promptly wrote to Abdülhamid, his letter translated into Turkish with "all the adjectives that are known by the pen of an Oriental poet":

Your Majesty:

I, your artist, have felt such embarrassment at seeing badly-made pictures of you being displayed throughout the metropolis that I am emboldened to dare request your consent that I might paint your picture. Your mighty forefather, Mehmed II, through diplomats of the Venetian Republic, summoned the Venetian artist, Gentile Bellini, to Istanbul to paint his portrait. I, being another Venetian and already at your command, humbly request from Your Royal Highness the same permission.

Your people would like a painting of you and I hope I will be able to create something worthy of Your Majesty and your illustrious nation.⁵⁴

In his memoirs, Zonaro explains the promise he had made twelve years prior, when he was hired as court painter, never to depict the Sultan. He respectfully notes the indigenous religious objections to imagery, although he remains perplexed by aversions to commemorative statuary and related prohibitions against cameras at court and binoculars at the weekly Friday processions. Protection from the dangers of images extended to the borders. "[T]he unchallenged scissors of the censor would cut [any foreign] picture up or [. . .] immediately prevent it from appearing in Ottoman lands," he writes. "Europe was not to see pictures of [Sultan Abdülhamid]."⁵⁵ Zonaro is sympathetic, but also protests: as a collector and patron, even an amateur painter, Abdülhamid clearly appreciated art. Was it not Zonaro's duty, as his court painter, to ensure that the Sultan was presented to the world with dignity and respect?

Persuaded by Zonaro's pleas, Abdülhamid sat for three sessions, resulting in three nearly identical portraits. One was selected for exhibition and given "the choicest of places," protected behind a green curtain that could be opened and closed with a cord—a nod to anxieties over such imagery at court. "Even

the head carriage driver [...] came to see the painting of his master with his glittering medals.”⁵⁶ But the Sultan was too preoccupied with politics to pay much attention, and rightfully so. Within the year, a counterrevolution deposed and exiled Abdülhamid. His successor, Mehmed V, had little interest in painting, and the Zonaros left soon after for Rome. Fausto’s sultanic portraits disappeared from Istanbul, much as Gentile’s portrait had under Bayezid II, their fate a mystery. They seem to survive only as photographs taken by Elisa. These show Abdülhamid, seated, in Western dress topped by a fez, with gaunt cheeks and a heavy, downward gaze. His hands rest on the hilt of his sword. He appears dignified but worn out—or perhaps this is a projection based on what we know of his future fate, akin to seeing illness and death hovering over Gentile’s picture of Mehmed II.

By the time Zonaro depicted Abdülhamid he had also painted Mehmed several times, in the Dolmabahçe portrait copied from Gentile and in narrative pictures of his own invention. Around 1906, Zonaro presented the sovereign with a canvas of Mehmed preparing for the siege of Constantinople. Abdülhamid objected that he could not identify the Conqueror and found only a picture of himself. Justifying the resemblance through a lauded family ancestry, Zonaro also flaunted his artistic credentials: “I studied the features of Mehmet II from the original painting [by Gentile Bellini] in the Lajard Gallery in Venice,” he explained—at once echoing earlier Ottoman searches for reliable imagery and undermining the fierce scissors of the modern censors.⁵⁷ Zonaro, already entranced by Istanbul, had been living in Venice around 1890 when the Ca’ Cappello was regularly open to guests and the Layard collection enjoyed great celebrity. He surely saw the portrait there, in its “place of honor” near the entrance.

Both the precision of the Dolmabahçe replica and its deviations indicate that Zonaro was working from a black-and-white photograph, a technique he frequently relied on to stimulate his memory and verify details for his realist style.⁵⁸ His replica is precise in outline and content, particularly in the architectural framing and jeweled tapestry, although its scale (significantly larger than the original) and color (the background is too brown, the robe too blue, the beard too black) point to the intervening photo. Zonaro played with the inscriptions too, abbreviating them to a minimal honorific and matching Gentile’s name, at left, with his own, at right. Despite this nod to his predecessor, Zonaro did not consider his replica to be a serious work of art.⁵⁹ There is no evidence that he ever exhibited it, and it appears in none of the photographs Elisa took of his studio and

apartment. As court painter, the Italian was obliged to do what the Sultan demanded of him—another experience he shared with Gentile.

Such copies enjoyed a brief surge of popularity at court and were possibly connected to the rumors of a new “Ottoman museum” under development in Istanbul a few years later.⁶⁰ Zonaro family account books from December 1908 include several payments for portraits of Mehmed II made by members of the royal household, including Prince Yusuf İzzeddin Efendi and the Queen Mother, whose copy was presented in an “oriental frame.”⁶¹ The painting currently at the Dolmabahçe Palace, where the Sultan and his family lived, may be one of these, another testament to the lingering power of that fifteenth-century prototype returned again to Istanbul. Much like Zonaro, I found this replica cumbersome, a second-rate imitation that kept getting in the way of my real work tracking down the “right” Bellini. I now see its presence as a reflection of my larger story, including the network of copies that knits truth to memory and permits the delicate alignment of authenticity, replication, and fame.

To London?

Emerging Debates over Cultural Patrimony

In 1915, a half century after resurfacing in Venice from a chasm of 400 lost years, Gentile's portrait of Mehmed II was back on the move. This time we find it in a wooden crate, packed tightly with other pictures in the Layard collection and placed on deposit at the British Embassy in Rome, awaiting shipment to England. The painting's passage is again mysterious, transpiring under a cloak of diplomatic immunity as Italy and the rest of Europe lurch toward war. When Austen Henry Layard died in 1894, he willed the Sultan portrait and his other pictures to his widow Enid, who remained with the collection in Venice until her death in 1912. A few months later, with only "a gondolier and two maids" to watch over them,¹ the paintings were deemed at risk and transferred to an upper floor of the local Correr Museum before being sent on to Rome, in the spring of 1915, for safekeeping.² Yet two key parties—the Layard family and the National Gallery—were in London, insisting that the pictures be delivered to them before battles and blockades impeded travel completely. Despite their urgings, it was not until late in the winter of 1916 that Gentile's *Sultan* finally made its way to England, by rail and sea, under the protection of a secure, official transport.

War was only one reason for delays in the export of the portrait. The other involved emerging notions of patrimony, or the idea that a people, and more explicitly a nation, has an inherent claim to the ownership of cultural goods. As Sir Rennell Rodd, Britain's ambassador in Rome, explained to the trustees of the National Gallery, Gentile's portrait was "one which the Italians specially covet," and he advised the Gallery to treat the case with diplomacy.³ National patrimony is a powerful and disruptive concept in the twenty-first century, known to us mostly through demands to museums across Europe and the United States that they repatriate objects to their so-called source countries. The most famous is the case of the Elgin or Parthenon Marbles, which were removed from the Parthenon temple in Athens in the early nineteenth century and have been

housed for over 200 years at the British Museum. Greece wants them back, and the conflict is not new. Lord Byron famously lamented their removal and defacement in his 1812 narrative poem *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. A century later, considering Gentile's portrait, Sir Rodd pointed to Greece as a warning: the "Mahomet picture [. . .] was regarded [by the Italians] somewhat as the Athenians regarded the Elgin Marbles," he wrote.⁴

It is a fortuitous comparison, shedding helpful light on the National Gallery's preoccupation with the export of Gentile's picture to London and the Italian resistance that are the subject of this chapter. Today, many consider the Elgin/Parthenon Marbles as the ultimate litmus test in the larger cultural patrimony debate, and believe their fate—staying put or being returned to Greece—is a key signal of where the museum world will land on this vexing issue.⁵ The choice of naming is not trivial. "Elgin Marbles" is the traditional British label, honoring the Layard-like figure, Lord Elgin, who brought them to London around 1810; "Parthenon Marbles" reminds us of their origins and implies that this is where they belong. One of the key difficulties in patrimony cases concerns nation states, their boundaries and nomenclature. Even if we were to agree fully that the objects produced by a particular culture in a particular place belong forever in that context (a big if), the circumstances muddy as time passes: Athens was under Ottoman control in 1810; Greece was not established as a nation for another decade; some current residents of Athens are recent arrivals in Greece; some Greeks have moved abroad but still hold onto their ethnic heritage. Moreover, the Marbles, although carved in Athens, are widely recognized as holding not only Greek but universal cultural value—indeed this is why the arguments surrounding them are so intense. It is virtually impossible to strike a clear, undisputed balance between evolving political entities and the shifting contours of cultural identity.

Italian resistance to the export of Gentile's *Sultan* was not mere sentiment or stubbornness but an early expression of this now familiar notion of national patrimony. Sir Rodd was encountering it all over Italy—among academics, in the press, and in the law. He suggested that the National Gallery consider a negotiation whereby the painting, which he considered a copy or at least heavily overpainted, would be left in Venice as a "historical Venetian treasure." A further challenge lay in the complexities of boundaries and names, wherein Venice and Italy were elided and a fundamentally international picture—painted by a Venetian for a Turk, purchased by an Englishman, claimed by Italy, and defined by its cross-cultural history—was pinned down as belonging to one place. Rodd and the trustees were probably unaware of a portentous Venetian legend, recounted at an Italian parliamentary hearing several years before, in which a

member of the venerable Grimani family had tried to sell a “precious statue” of Marcus Agrippa abroad. Just as it was being loaded onto a boat, the state inquisitor appeared to bid a good journey to the statue and, menacingly, “to his excellency Grimani as well.”⁶ The threat of banishment was fierce: the statue stayed (it is now in the Correr Museum) and so did Grimani. A precedent was set, but not one that was able to keep Gentile’s *Sultan* in Venice.

An international picture in Venice

From the outset, the British press treated Gentile’s portrait as an object of international interest and value. An article in the *Leicester Chronicle*, published days after Lady Layard’s death and in response to general discussions about the fate of her collection, presents the portrait in terms resonant for a jittery European continent that was watching the fracture of historical alliances and grand empires—most notably that of the Ottomans. The painting “has a ‘topical’ interest,” the paper reports, “for it is a portrait of Mehemet II., who took Constantinople in 1453, and who also annexed most of Ser[b]ia, Greece, and most of the Aegean Islands.”⁷ His distant successor, the beleaguered Sultan Mehmed V (brother of Layard’s one-time associate Abdülhamid II), was fighting for survival on all fronts. War in the Balkans, against opponents backed by Russia, was an existential threat to the Ottomans, and would soon escalate and erupt into the great conflagrations of World War I. A struggle for power was also playing out within the empire as the so-called Old Turks, supporters of the Sultan, vied with the modernizing Young Turks for political control. “Message from Sultan,” proclaimed a British headline of December 1912, “The Turks Cannot Give Up Claims on Adrianople” (today’s Edirne, near the modern border with Greece [Chapter 2, Figure 2.3]).⁸ When the British public thought about sultans, Ottomans, and empire, they did not need to check history books for points of reference. They had a ready place for them all in modern geopolitics. For those still unable to link current events to distant history, war to painting, the *Pall Mall Gazette* spelled it out:

Even the Philistine [...] in the affairs of art will note the irony of chance that brings us the portrait of the victor of Constantinople at a moment when that peerless city, the Gate of the East and West, is trembling in the balance. It is one of those flashes of coincidence that lend history half its magic.⁹

The renown of Gentile’s picture well predated these discussions in the British press. It had been a centerpiece of the Layards’ collection at the Ca’ Cappello in

Venice, where the couple regularly hosted a prominent circle of artists, writers, and cultural aficionados—the house was “thrown open to Englishmen at any season and almost at any hour.”¹⁰ Lady Enid Layard’s diary provides a glimpse into this scene, which continued to thrive after her husband’s death. Holman Hunt, Horatio Brown, “Mr. Armstrong of the Irish Nat. Gallery,” Oxford academics, and a continual parade of dukes and duchesses, barons and baronesses, counts, countesses, consuls, and ambassadors visited her home and her pictures. Margherita of Savoy, Queen of Italy, made an appearance on a July morning in 1903. She was apparently a nosy sort, asking to see bedrooms and poking through the linen closets, but “stopped on the [entry] stairs to examine the bits of Nineveh marble wh[ich] are there & as soon as she got to the hall at once to the Bellini portrait of Mahomet II.”¹¹

The Layard collection was well known in Istanbul as well. A year before Lady Layard’s death, she was approached by a government representative about permitting a copy of Gentile’s Mehmed portrait to be made for a new “Ottoman museum in Constantinople, where they were to gather all the memories of the Empire.” If the dates reported here are accurate, this could not be the portrait done by Fausto Zonaro discussed earlier—but the precise history of these replicas is not clear. The request also recalls Sokollu Mehmed Pasha’s late-sixteenth-century efforts to create an illustrated genealogical history, and confirms that Gentile’s picture retained its status as a venerable, reliable historical source, centuries later. According to an article in the *Marzocco* by Venetian scholar and collector Aldo Ravà, Lady Layard gladly agreed to the request for a copy and even identified an artist to make it—until the Italian expedition to annex Libya intervened. This proved a political wedge, as Libya was then a province of the Ottoman Empire and its last foothold in Africa. Italy, in a bellicose call to territorial patrimony, claimed rights as heirs to the Roman Empire that once covered large swaths of North Africa. In the event, any Ottoman plan to copy Layard’s portrait fell by the wayside: “Naturally no one speaks of this anymore,” Ravà laments.¹²

Despite, or perhaps because of, this international interest in the painting, Italian attitudes toward it ran to the nostalgic and the nationalistic. On 10 November 1912, the *Marzocco* published an impassioned plea from Angelo Conti to keep Layard’s pictures in Venice.¹³ Conti, a writer and scholar expert in Venetian collections, recalls a gray January day when he first experienced the famed golden atmosphere of Venice, not in person but in a small painting by Vittore Carpaccio that hung in Layard’s palace on the Grand Canal. Carpaccio’s light was fluid and harmonizing, Conti says; it helped him see clearly the

distinctive, translucent surface of water, the fine details of architecture, the brilliant colors of vestments. Conti looked out the palace window, then back at the canvas—itself like a window, he explains, but a window onto the past that brings a lost time and place back to life. The Venice that once was slipping away, and for Conti artworks could hold that loss at bay. They were essential connections to a place vanishing into the mist of memory.

Of all the paintings in Layard's palace, it was Gentile's "miraculous" portrait of Mehmed that most fully captured Conti's imagination and drove his pen. The portrait evokes a person, his character, and the literal textures of his daily life, he says, but it is also a matter of historical record, calling to mind both the artist's trip to Istanbul and the complex history of before and after, from the fall of Christian Constantinople under the Muslim "Conqueror" to the subsequent loss of Venetian territories in the eastern Mediterranean. For Conti, the dispersal of artworks to Britain echoed these other, more monumental defeats, and seemed another case of an imperial power flexing its muscle against local interests. Allowing this collection of paintings, these marks of "Italian genius," to leave the city would be a moral defeat, he says, a monstrous absurdity and a tragedy worthy of national mourning.

Calling Gentile and his painting "Italian" made sense in 1912 but is a problematic notion in the historical framework that Conti was proposing. Venice was an independent republic in 1480, had been for centuries, and would stay that way for several more, folding only under pressure from Napoleonic forces in 1797. Italy as a concept and as a nation belongs to the nineteenth century, after the ragtag armies of Giuseppe Garibaldi brought an eclectic assortment of republics, kingdoms, and city-states together under the banner of the Italian flag (some, familiar with Italy's intense regionalism, say the concept is still in development). Gentile's picture, moreover, was commissioned by the Ottoman sultan, driven by his resources and inspiration. The empire that was crumbling to Italy's east might have legitimately claimed this picture as "Turkish" if it had not had other, more pressing issues to attend to—not only war in Libya but serious challenges in the Balkans. For Ravà, as for those English journalists, there was a "curious sense of present reality" in the portrait, "as the Turks are losing the European empire conquered by Mehmed II himself."¹⁴

It was Britain's claim to the painting that troubled the Italians, however, because it was literal. The National Gallery intended to bring the picture to London and hang it on its walls. Ravà, accepting the inevitability of a successful British claim, proposed instead a compromise: why not set up a British Academy in Venice, in the Layards' very palace, along the lines of the foreign artistic

academies in Rome? This would not only keep attention focused on a great private collection (it would get lost among the many treasures of the National Gallery—“*ricchissima*,” Ravà notes with envy) but would also renew and revitalize an important diplomatic relationship. Painting as a tool of diplomacy: we have seen it before in Gentile’s original mission to Istanbul, and here it is again in Ravà’s proposal. It is ironic that a work deemed international in meaning and scope is simultaneously held up as a standard of national genius and local identity. This irony runs through modern patrimony disputes as well, as “universal value” is pitted against nationalist claims to heritage.

Cultural nationalism and Italian legislation

The surrounding legal context sheds light on this tension, situating it more clearly in Italy and in relation to Gentile’s portrait, *c.* 1912. Many of those who commented on the fate of Layard’s collection turned to this very line of argumentation: sentiment aside, they wrote, we need to consider what can and cannot be done under the auspices of the law. Is the picture permitted to depart Italy or not?

The answer lay in the notion of vinculation—in Italian *vincolo*, meaning a “bond” or “constraint.” This concept was the core of a law, L. 185, passed by the Italian legislature in 1902. Addressing the “Preservation of Monuments and of Objects of Antiquity and Art,” L. 185 centered on materials of “great cultural and historical interest” that were privately owned, forbidding their export or leaving assessment of that export up to the state—in effect, chaining those things to Italy.¹⁵ A list of vinculated works was drawn up and published in 1903 in the *Gazzetta Ufficiale del Regno d’Italia*, a pamphlet dedicated to the business of state. Sandwiched among a dizzying array of notices—international assessments of farm sanitation (bovine plague had struck hard in Egypt that November), freight tonnage tables for shipping lines, ambassadorial updates from London and St. Petersburg, notable funerals, and so forth—is a catalog, alphabetical by city, of “objects of great merit (*pregio*), for history or art, in private hands.” There, under Venice and Lady Enid Layard, Palazzo Cappello, is our painting: Gentile Bellini, *Ritratto di Maometto II*.¹⁶ Inclusion on this list, under the terms of L. 185, meant the portrait was to stay in Italy, ideally to be acquired by the state for public good. (The ultimate failure to keep it there lay in the fine print.)

L. 185 was the legal expression of a growing sentiment that Italian art and culture belonged and should remain on national soil. The sentiment was not

unique to that country but was a typical, prominent expression of the nationalist movements that defined the nineteenth century. The idea of a national patrimony, a culture associated with a homeland and its terrain, grew out of the French Revolution and that country's institutionalization of all manner of expression, including art and historic monuments. "Patrimony" as a term comes out of the practices and language of inheritance, literally pointing to what is passed down from one's father (Latin *pater*). What emerged in France and spread across Europe was a linking of inheritance—understood as cultural sites and historic objects, including artworks—to nationhood and citizenship: so a French person, born on French soil, had a nearly biological connection and a genealogical right to the material heritage of the French nation. This was a novel formulation and it played well in the nascent Italian state, relatively poor in unifying ideologies but rich in historic art and architecture.

Attempts at preserving and protecting art had a pre-revolutionary history in Italy as well, led by the Papal States and the Vatican. Oversight of an increasing number of Roman excavations in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries led, in 1624, to a papal edict that forbade the export of art and antiquities without a license from the pope (the "Aldobrandini Edict"). A list of protected objects was drawn up and, within a few decades, boats and other vessels were being inspected to prevent the illegal "alienation" of objects. A century later the Vatican abandoned the concept of a list as too cumbersome and put forth a more general prohibition against the export of "renowned works of sculpture and painting, especially those works deemed the most admirable and rare because of their antiquity." Private collections were also subject to cataloging and export control. In the 1770s the Venetian Republic followed suit, drawing up lists of artworks in churches in order to better care for and manage them. The case of Signor Grimani and his statue dates from this same era.¹⁷

Although akin in outlook to the law of 1902, these earlier attempts at restricting exports were not imbued with the language of nationalism, which grew out of the French patrimony model and required an "Italian state" in order to gain broad traction. Like so many other elements of nation building, Italian patrimony was an institutionalized concept more than an organic one, an intentional leveraging of resources—in this case, monuments and artworks—to satisfy the needs of the young state. "If among new peoples art is a luxury," a newspaper editorial of 1903 declared, contrasting upstarts (presumably American collectors) with the long history of the Italians, "in Italy art is the core of our national soul that has been pulsating continually for thirty centuries."¹⁸ Italy as a modern nation was not yet fifty years old, but official voices called to a

shared culture that stretched much further back, far enough even to support the claims to ancient Roman Libya that were provoking Italian imperial ambitions and war. Advocates held that the politics of art and monuments could operate alongside those of economics, international affairs, and domestic policy to consolidate the nation and the people that lived within its borders as “Italian.”¹⁹

It is hard to say how much the people of Italy, generally, shared these sentiments of attachment to a national past through old things. Certainly not everyone did. In 1916, the Futurist artist F. T. Marinetti, a militant advocate for technological and aesthetic modernity, circulated leaflets in Venice that “call[ed] upon Italy to recoup herself for the war [...] by selling her old masters to the other nations, and particularly to America.”²⁰ With regard to the Layard collection, however, British ambassador Rodd worried about the Venetians, advising the trustees of the National Gallery to minimize attention to the movement of the pictures. “Could you arrange transfer through Brown who holds keys or do you desire presence of Director[?]” he asked. “We are a little afraid his arrival might excite public feeling.”²¹ Some who made their living around art, including Layard’s circle of dealers, restorers, and fellow collectors, periodically abandoned their clinical assessment of value and markets to give voice to cultural patriotism, and Layard on occasion echoed them. Despite his ultimate decision to will his collection to a museum in London, for example, he decided at one point to sell a few Milanese works to someone he was confident would stay put, with his paintings, in Milan.

Layard’s Italian advisors were more consistently protectionist and at times overtly nationalistic, peppering their actions with acerbic commentary. The critic Giovanni Morelli was proud to see Italian art in foreign collections, but he believed the best work should be kept in Italy and labored with the government in the 1860s to “prepare a law for the retention of works of art.”²² Although congratulatory in a message to his friend Layard, Morelli was less upbeat in a letter of 1872 to a fellow Italian following the Englishman’s acquisition of some “precious paintings” at bargain prices from the Galleria Costabili in Ferrara. “Here in Italy the rich are too stupid to be able to appreciate and admire these sorts of things,” Morelli lamented.²³ The writer Alessandro Manzoni, touring London, flipped this criticism on its head. “What can I say of London?” he wrote in a letter to an Italian collector, “[T]he English have no taste in [architecture], for in general they are anything but good artists; but in collecting objects of art and science they are second to none, and moreover seem to know no limits in spending when it comes to acquisitions that will make their museums more interesting and complete.”²⁴

Even as he worked actively as an art dealer to foreign clients, Morelli tried to keep the best paintings in Italy—telling an English collector that the famous *Tempest* by Giorgione (“or so it is held to be by connoisseurs,” he says, slyly seeding doubt about the attribution) is in poor condition, overpriced, and too obscure in subject matter to really be appealing. Morelli had to fight off other foreign attempts to purchase Giorgione’s canvas, including that of the “Prussian” Wilhelm von Bode, director of the Kaiser Friederich (now Bode) Museum in Berlin, finally invoking the help of the government to persuade an Italian buyer to step in.²⁵ Today the *Tempest* is one of the stars of the Accademia Gallery in Venice. The restorer Giuseppe Molteni, likewise, hoped to see a painting by Bramantino go to the Brera Museum (both Milanese; it ended up, via Layard, in London), and a portrait by Moretto to Bergamo rather than France or England. These Italians were successful to a degree. Sir William Boxall, director of the National Gallery in London, wrote to Layard in 1877, “Morelli and Cavalcaselle I find are both enemies to our carrying off fine pictures and I cannot tell you how impossible such acquisitions are becoming throughout the country.”²⁶

In 1912, with regard to the Layard collection, the *Morning Post* reported on the

[fear] in some quarters that the municipal authorities of Venice might look with disfavour on the removal from the banks of the Grand Canal of so important a collection, especially as it has proved a constant source of attraction to those strangers who have made proper application in advance to Lady Layard.²⁷

It is a mournful but illuminating aside to note the decimation, only a few years later, of the city’s population as it fled the lagoon for safer ground. Venice was a strategic target during World War I, still home after many centuries to an active naval base and defense industry, and located near a crucial border and the defensive line at Piave. By late in the war, the city was enduring frequent air attacks by the Austro-Hungarian forces, and its people were seeking refuge elsewhere.²⁸ “Venice had a ghostly aspect when I entered it in bright moonlight,” wrote a reporter for the *Sheffield Daily* in 1917,

for the city seemed almost wholly deserted. As a matter of fact, two-thirds of the population have already left the city, with the assistance of the authorities, who are anxious to diminish, as far as possible, the number of useless mouths. The exodus now averages one thousand daily.²⁹

First art, then the populace. The bond between culture and humanity, their well-being and their vulnerability, is manifest in these poignant losses.

Italy's vinculation list of 1903 proved an imperfect tool for preventing the exodus of its art, leading to years of legislative debate. A list was inherently arbitrary and impossible to make comprehensive. Who was going to decide which works were "of interest" (exportable) as opposed to "of great interest" or of *sommo interesse* ("the greatest interest" and not exportable)? Some legislators and experts worried that a vinculation list would actually encourage exports, since quantities of "lesser" art would need to be sold, quite possibly abroad, in order to fund state purchases of vinculated works to ensure they remain in Italy for the public good. Others warned that the list was isolationist, removing Italy from a vibrant market and making it much harder to buy art and bring it into the country. Enforcement seemed nearly impossible. Were spies going to be set up to track collectors and all their business dealings?³⁰

The answer was not obvious even to expert dealers such as Morelli, who were intimately involved in the art trade and often played it from both sides. A larger concern preoccupying lawyers and those in the sphere of government involved the proper balance between the rights of individuals and those of a nation. Many worried about what a restriction on exports portended for the holding of private property. If the state can dictate which artworks can and cannot be sold and to whom, there could be implications for other sorts of property as well. Politically, this was the crux of the matter, and the responses from legislators were themselves steeped in tradition. Those from elite backgrounds and tied to the royal houses of the Piedmont region, for example, argued for the need to preserve private ownership above all else; those from more populist regions in central and southern Italy favored protection for public use and public good.³¹

Despite radical changes in the cultural landscape over the last century, many of the matters that were being hashed out in early-twentieth-century Italian legislative debates are still in play, shaping disputes in the arena of cultural heritage—as confirmed by the ongoing Elgin/Parthenon Marbles debates. The balance of private and public rights to cultural goods, for example, takes many forms: Should governments be able to control the import and export of artworks, such as archaeological finds of unclear origin or paintings they deem "national treasures"? Should auction houses facilitate the sale of objects belonging to third parties but claimed by indigenous groups? Should museums, which benefit from shared resources through favorable tax status and may even be owned by the citizenry, be allowed freely to sell objects in their collection, quite possibly removing them from the public sphere?³²

It is much easier for modern governments to stand up for private property ownership than to articulate the value of protecting artistic and cultural objects

at public expense. The art historian Salvatore Settis, examining the idea that art is “Italy’s petroleum”—a native resource that can enrich the country—points to the subtle message in the 1974 renaming of the Italian Cultural Ministry’s division, previously headed “Antichità e Belle Arti” (“Antiquity and Fine Arts”). Rededicated to “beni culturali,” or “cultural goods,” its name suggests a monetized way of thinking about art and monuments, as “goods” akin to other assets that might be liquidated rather than preserved.³³ If they are not sold, “goods” can at least be exploited locally for financial gain, in this case through tourism. But throngs of visitors are not an effective tool of preservation. No one knows that better than the residents of Venice, now literally outnumbered by tourists every day and plagued with crowds that just keep growing. These circumstances beg us to ask what larger social good these economic goods can and should serve (the double-meaning of *beni* works in Italian as well).

A related matter concerns the perceived value of cultural heritage for people at large and how that gets defined. Not surprisingly, governments cleave to a nationally driven interpretation: Greek heritage, the claim goes, belongs to Greece, Nigerian heritage to Nigeria, Chinese heritage to China, and so forth. Setting aside what “Greece,” “Nigeria,” and “China” (established in 1821, 1914, and 1949, respectively) signify when talking about ancient objects that predate modern nation states, as well as the fact that national boundaries rarely, if ever, equate with ethnic groups, and discounting the complicated meanings of “belonging,” a deeper paradox can be found in the desire to simultaneously recognize both universal value and national determination for the very same objects. If objects are of “greatest historical interest” or “supreme artistic value,” as spokesmen for Italian patrimony claims contended around 1910, does that value stop at a country’s borders?³⁴ “Genius,” one could easily argue, transcends geography and is even defined through its universalism.

Yet there is a clear claim to “Italian genius” (Conti’s words) among those who were trying to vinctuate Italian artworks a century ago, just as cultural nationalists today want to bring the best “Italian” objects back to Italy—never mind that a good number of those objects were produced by Etruscans who had never heard of Garibaldi or entrepreneurial Greeks who exported them to markets far across the Mediterranean.³⁵ Never mind that a work like Gentile’s portrait of Mehmed exists only because of the many cultural strands—Venetian, Ottoman, British, Italian—that brought it into being and preserved it for the present. Again we confront the irony: the insistent idea that the art most likely to speak to all and be appreciated across boundaries would best stay put, in a narrowly defined place of origin.

Implementation and outcome

Even as steps were being taken to implement L. 185, the 1902 Italian patrimony law, and the related vinculation list of 1903, these measures were the subject of intense debate. Discussions dragged on over matters such as the preservation of natural resources (included under the American Antiquities Act of 1906), appropriate penalties for illicit exports, and, again, balancing private property rights with public good. Particularities aside, some worried that existing legislation was simply not being enforced. In parliamentary hearings of 3 May 1906, attention turned to the “emigration” to Boston of a precious picture of *Christ Carrying the Cross* by Gentile Bellini's brother Giovanni, still today in the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. Author, lawyer, and parliamentarian Giovanni Rosadi railed against the failure to enforce protective laws and keep Italian art in Italy. “[So] here's the legal safeguarding [*tutela*] of the artistic patrimony of our country!” he scoffed. “The judiciary that should be applying the law [...] doesn't decide to close the barn door when the oxen have escaped, but when they've been good and eaten!”³⁶

It literally took an earthquake to get lawmakers to wrap up their ongoing disagreements in a new piece of legislation, the 1909 Rosadi–Ravà edict.³⁷ The quake of 28 December 1908, which registered 7.5 on the Richter scale, devastated eastern Sicily and Reggio Calabria, killing over 80,000 people and ravaging natural and cultural sites. “It is too awful! One can hardly believe it[.]” wrote Lady Layard on New Year's Day 1909, as she rallied assistance for medical aid. “On 4th of Decr I passed thro' Messina in the evening resplendent with light & life—& now—it is a ruin!”³⁸ The new law, L. 364, “For Antiquities and Fine Art,” put tighter reins on export controls, abandoning the flawed notion of an inventory and instead opening up any item “of interest” to a possible government claim. This approach to patrimony, too, poses challenges. In addition to its vast scope of protection, it assesses the value of artworks negatively, through fear of export rather than a positive statement of their importance. It also foregrounds markets by emphasizing what the state can acquire rather than asserting philosophical principles based on the importance of art and history to the common good.³⁹

Gentile's portrait of Mehmed escaped the net of cultural patriotism and made its way to London on a technicality: intended to focus on indigenous Italian objects, the vinculation laws were not applied to artworks that had been imported into the country and, as it turned out, Austen Henry Layard had previously sent much of his collection, including the portrait of the Sultan, to Britain. The

Italians demanded proof of this temporary exile and got it in the form of exhibition records, in 1868 at Leeds and in 1869 at the South Kensington Museum (today the Victoria and Albert and the portrait's present home).⁴⁰ The exhibitions coincided with Layard's own appointment as ambassador to Spain, which prompted him to send pictures from his private London apartments on tour. When he left Madrid in 1877 to take up the ambassadorial post in Istanbul, he had his collection shipped back to Italy and installed in the Ca' Cappello on the Grand Canal. Hence these works, no matter how "Italian" and notwithstanding the sentiments of art loving officials and academics, were technically imports and had a life history that allowed them, even under the restrictions of 1909, to go back into circulation after Lady Layard's death.

Their return trip to London was not an easy one, however. Once matters of vinculation had been settled firmly in favor of the British, and the trustees of the National Gallery and executors of Layard's will had come to agreements about what to do with his pictures (a confrontation explored in the next chapter), export was still jeopardized, this time by the war. The trustees spent much of 1915 agonizing over the safest way to get the Layards' pictures out of Italy, across the seething European continent, and over the English Channel. They debated timing, some asserting that proximity to the Vatican in Rome might protect the works against air raids while others advocated a rapid exodus. They examined different routes and means of transport, including the relative merits of travel by passenger and cargo trains (the former being more costly but ultimately safer) and, in consultation with the Royal Admiralty, the dangers posed by German submarines off the northern coast of France. Legally speaking, by February 1916, "the liberation of the pictures had been completed,"⁴¹ export duties on the collection had been paid, and the trustees awaited only a guarantee that shipments would not be opened and inspected at the borders. On 28 February, at 11:15 p.m., the pictures and their frames, packed into crates and safely sealed with an "Official Plomb," left the railway station of Rome for the coast of Normandy. The trustees had asked the Admiralty to pick the safest port of departure—it chose Dieppe—and demanded continual updates from customs officials, including the precise time each crate was to be expected at Victoria Station, London. Once seaside, the shipment was split up and the crates were ferried across the English Channel, one by one, minimizing the risk of a total loss.

An "unexamined" case said to contain six pictures left Dieppe on 13 March, another slipped out on the 19th, another on the 23rd, and on and on into the spring. By early May, fourteen crates, seven each of paintings and frames, had arrived safely at Victoria, where each was met by Gallery officials—"please send

someone without fail to receive [the crate] on arrival at the Station,” insist the dispatches from the port. Scores of telegrams, hastily scribbled notes, and scrappy checklists reveal patience and nerves wearing thin.⁴² Customs agent F. C. Humphries, stationed at Rum Quay, West India Dock, was reprimanded when he inquired about the nature of a crate’s content: was it being imported as merchandise? he asked. “For his future information,” came the curt reply, “the pictures thus consigned to the National Gallery are the property of His Majesty’s Government and as such are under the special charge of H.M. Foreign Office and Admiralty.” No more obstacles and no more questions, of bureaucracy, taxes, or prying inspectors, were going to be tolerated. The safe transport of the Layard collection seems to distill the larger fears about Europe and its devastation, as though the fervid protection of a few paintings could stave off—at least psychologically—an even greater calamity.

Gentile’s *Sultan* had finally returned to London, its frame traveling separately in one of the final shipments out of Normandy. A penciled inventory locates the portrait in the National Gallery’s west basement, in case number five.⁴³ Suddenly this picture, which had disappeared for centuries and was only known through a veil of texts, can be traced and tracked nearly to the day, as it made its way across land and sea to the safety of a museum vault. This wartime journey is emblematic of its larger history as an itinerant object, much as the face of its Ottoman subject stood for the collapse of an age-old empire—“the lineaments of [a] conqueror whose achievement lies to-day in ruins.”⁴⁴

The geopolitics of art—and indeed there is such a thing—takes us back to the matter of cultural heritage and its association with identity, to the concept of national patrimony that was just taking hold around 1900. We might fairly wonder, pondering Italian vinculation laws and their exceptions, how far back policy enforcers would have been willing to go in their search for an object’s history. Italians considered this Venetian painting their own. But Gentile’s portrait was produced in Istanbul as part of a diplomatic project and at the behest of an Ottoman patron. It was, at its core, an export (from the Turkish perspective), and its presence in Italy, or anywhere at all, was thanks to the culture of exchange that had defined Venice for centuries. Its arrival from England to hang at Layard’s Ca’ Cappello was not the first time it had been imported into the Italian peninsula—it was at least the second. Mobility had defined this picture from its inception.

Gentile Bellini’s portrait of Mehmed II embodies the fundamental paradoxes of protectionist cultural legislation drawn according to national borders and ethnic identities, including both early-twentieth-century Italian laws and those

of today. It is a Venetian work but also an Ottoman one; it is Italian but, now, too, British; and as a later chapter will show, it is still very much Turkish, but quite differently so. This rather particular painting is of specific regional interest, but also of much broader cultural relevance. It is cross-cultural, not just in its production but in its material history and its legacy. The question of who can claim such an object, why, and how, is as pertinent today as it was a century ago.

Art, History, or Heirloom

Classifying Gentile's Portrait in the Twentieth Century

Claims to Gentile's portrait of Mehmed II took on a more personal tone in London, but even then the case of the picture's proper resting place was not easily settled. Just days after Lady Layard's death in November 1912, the trustees of the National Gallery met and reviewed the terms of her husband's will, which had been certified two decades prior. Unfortunately for the various parties involved, when it came to the fate of his painting collection, Sir Austen Henry Layard and his lawyers had left the door open to some serious interpretive challenges:

I give and bequeath all of my said pictures (except portraits) or such of my said pictures as the Trustees and the Director for the time being of the National Gallery may select [...]. But the portraits of myself and all my family and other portraits [...] I give and bequeath after the death of my said wife free of legacy duty to my nephew Arthur Austen Macgregor Layard Captain R.E. for his absolute use and benefit.¹

All. Except. But. These words were preludes to trouble. For those involved in untangling Layard's will, even "portrait" was a fraught concept, not helped by that broad category of "other portraits" slipped in among the pictures depicting the testator and his family.

Major Layard, as Arthur Austen Macgregor is referred to in the National Gallery documents—apparently having received a military promotion after Sir Henry's death—saw an opportunity in the vagaries of the will and its language. In February 1913, he submitted a petition to the Gallery for all his uncle's portraits, including those of the Layard family and the "other" ones the document all too casually mentions. Major Layard especially coveted Gentile's *Portrait of Sultan Mehmed II*, upping the ante on it as the months of negotiation wore on. The National Gallery, by contrast, believed that Austen Henry Layard was too sophisticated a patron and collector to slot every manner of portraiture—"of

myself and all my family and other”—into a single, undifferentiated category. Not all portraits were identical in intention, function, or status, and Sir Henry had known it. Although the trustees had some doubts about the quality and value of Gentile's picture, it was an important pawn in their strategy to bring the Layard collection at last to the National Gallery, and they eventually centered their legal strong-arming of Major Layard on that very painting.

Because of the wording of Sir Henry's will, the fate of Gentile's canvas ultimately depended on its status as a portrait. This dilemma and its legal ramifications did not escape public notice. “What is a Portrait?” asked the heading in the *Pall Mall Gazette* as the Layard case was at last wrapping up in the Appeal Court in April 1916.² The tussle over this picture, including the reams of evidence—expert opinions, signed affidavits, and pages of affiliated documents—surviving in London's Parliamentary Archives, allow us to frame some responses to this question generally and as it pertains to the star witness, Gentile Bellini's image of Sultan Mehmed II. Yet our conclusion may only be provisional. As the *Gazette* warned its readers, “What is a Portrait? [...] the answer is not so easy to find as some people may suppose.”

“Once a portrait, always a portrait”?

“Once a portrait, always a portrait.” So went the professional opinion of Charles H. Sargant, submitted to the National Gallery shortly after Arthur Layard's initial claim. As counsel to Her Majesty's Treasury (which oversaw the Gallery's finances and was thus deeply enmeshed in its affairs), Sargant took a legal approach to this case and focused on lexical precision.³ “In my opinion,” Sargant declared, “the word portraits in this will has its ordinary meaning of pictures painted for the portrayal of particular persons the main original interest being in the individual rather than the painting.” Even if “interest [...] has shifted from personal to artistic,” it remains a portrait. In parsing the will's language, he concluded that its words of exemption from the Gallery (“except portraits”) and words of gift to his nephew (“all my family and other portraits”) fully overlapped: “accordingly [...] Major [Arthur] Layard takes all the pictures expressly excepted from the gift to the National Gallery”—some fourteen portraits at issue were rightly his, Sargant concluded.⁴ Other advisors concurred: the museum's case was legally weak, for a portrait is a portrait and all of Layard's portraits were clearly left to the family.

Sargant advocated a compromise, suggesting Major Layard give the Gallery some of the historical portraits in exchange for its efforts to free the Layard

collection from Italian vinculation laws. The British ambassador to Italy, Sir Rennell Rodd, likewise urged limiting his claim to all pictures except the “family and modern portraits.”⁵ But Arthur Layard held fast, communicating through his solicitor, Dennis Herbert, “private reasons to believe that Sir Henry had intended to bequeath to him an important part of his Collection of pictures, and [his intent] to abide by the wording of the Will entitling him to all portraits.”⁶ The museum insisted that it had witnesses—Lady Bessborough, Mrs. Hallam Tennyson, and the Misses Du Cane (Olivia Du Cane inherited Ca’ Cappello)—who could “bear testimony to Sir Henry Layard’s expression of his intention to include all except modern portraits in his Bequest to the National Gallery.”⁷ The back and forth evident in the Gallery’s records from 1913 shows the museum preparing for both direct negotiations and legal action. Likewise, Major Arthur Layard’s solicitors indicated willingness to compromise but would not rule out “submission of the case to a Court of Law.”⁸

In November 1913, the Gallery offered Major Layard £5,000 (about \$25,000 at the time, and over 100 times that today) to let go of his claims.⁹ He countered that £25,000 was the minimum fair value of the historical portraits he was due, and a few weeks later laid out two options to the museum: pay him £5,000 along with the delivery, in England, of five such portraits, including Gentile’s Mehmed; or make it seven portraits for that price, including Mehmed, and turn the works over in Italy where Major Layard would deal with Italian customs officials himself. One additional possibility was dangled before the National Gallery: Major Layard “would be quite prepared to give an option for three months for the Trustees [...] to purchase the picture [of Mahommed II] by Gentile Bellini at the price of £50,000”—around \$25 million today.¹⁰ The trustees flatly rejected this inflated number and returned to their original offer of one-tenth the major’s daring counter-bid.¹¹ They also refused to let his meddling get in the way of their own ongoing negotiations with the Italian government for the release of the Layard collection, omitting Gentile’s portrait from their dealings with Italy “until the dispute with Major Layard should be settled.” Italy agreed to the export of the full collection in the summer of 1914, and although discussions over logistical details continued under the darkening shadow of war, the National Gallery trustees were able to focus more directly on that other impediment to their efforts, Major Arthur Layard.

Having failed to persuade Major Layard to cede his claim to the historical portraits, the National Gallery turned to the legal system. Negotiations over estates and the hairsplitting of wills are hardly novel, but the Layard case headed in a peculiar and happily enlightening direction. Testimony sought out and compiled by the trustees delves into theories of portraiture that complement and clarify some of

our own inquiries into the Sultan portrait. For although the question of what constitutes a portrait lies at the very core of its history—in the context of Gentile's representational skill, Mehmed's expectations, and the ambitions of his sixteenth-century Ottoman followers—none of those players set down in words what they intended by “portrait” or its surrogate terms, whether retracing (*retracto*), reflection, or documentation. The National Gallery, by contrast, required precision to make its legal case, and so it called in an array of specialists to offer their opinion on the matter. It also dug deep into Sir Henry Layard's papers, commissioning typed copies of his correspondence with art dealers and scholars as it hunted for shreds of evidence that could help define the intentions behind his will. The resulting dossier reads like art theory crossed with intellectual property law, embellished with the observations of a private eye. Gentile's portrait is the critical piece of evidence.

Of greatest concern to the trustees was setting out a definition for the deceptively simple term, “portrait.” According to Algernon Graves, Fellow of the Society of Antiquarians and a picture dealer who gave a deposition on 22 May 1914, a portrait is:

a picture which is drawn or painted with the intention on the part of the artist of making a likeness of the person represented, and with reasonable materials or means of making such a likeness; [including] (a) sittings by the actual person, (b) another or other portraits of the person, and (c) a reasonably sufficient memory of the person on the part of the artist.¹²

Those with training can usually tell if a work is a portrait, Graves said. Unlike stock faces with standard expressions, portraits display a careful delineation of individual features in a deliberate attempt to match picture to life. Using accessories as an analogy (the generic halo as opposed to a distinctive insignia), he implies that portraits are defined by specificity—period dress, a personal attribute like a book or letter, and the lineaments of a “striking and remarkable” face. For Graves, there was no doubt about the status of “portrait” with regard to any of Layard's contested works, and he underscored this conclusion by pointing to Gentile's picture of Mehmed II. A portrait, said Graves, echoing Charles H. Sargent, remains one even if the subject is no longer of personal interest.

Graves could not have known that he was wading into a matter of importance to subsequent scholars of Gentile Bellini's narrative paintings, namely the question of which figures in his throngs of witnesses to miracles and spectacles were portraits and which were types (Plate 3). Art historians have argued that those with precise, individualized features represent real people—senators, cardinals, prelates, ambassadors, patron-donors, artists (Gentile included)—and

those with uniform, idealized faces do not.¹³ Not surprisingly, given their relative visibility in public spaces, the portraits that pop up among Gentile's painted crowds tend to be of men; women were less often seen in public, less often named, and generally less known as individuals—certainly by historians and likely by contemporaries. But it is the slippage in category that is most notable here. Contrary to Graves' assertion, experts with considerable training can be unsure about and disagree over whether a particular image is or is not a portrait.

Nor is the category of portrait as stable as Sargant, Graves, and another witness, art journalist and critic William Roberts, assert. The apparently simple idea that portraits are "the portrayal of particular persons" (Sargant) and a "likeness and presentment of the person" (Roberts) is, in fact, wildly complicated.¹⁴ Far from merely duplicating external appearances, portraits of the Italian Renaissance (as elsewhere and today) were generally choreographed to make a public point; identification trumped recognition, and representation was more potent and enduring than likeness.¹⁵ "Get my good side," we say to the photographer, and perhaps Mehmed asked the same of Gentile. Portraits are their own form of fiction, and we might even consider Mehmed's face part of the trappings—along with the presentation window, ornate tapestry, and stately dress—through which his image was invented. An extreme but relevant example can be found in an anonymous print from the 1540s showing Sultan Süleyman I in a gloriously bejewelled helmet produced for him by Venetian goldsmiths (Figure 8.1). Süleyman's long neck, fine features, and hooked nose match other contemporary portraits, but his triple-tiered, engraved headdress is far more precisely delineated. Some portraitists elevated their sitters by placing them in the guise of heroes and gods, for example the Florentine Duke Cosimo I as Orpheus and Genoese Admiral Andrea Doria as Neptune—both notably unclothed—as painted by Bronzino. Others presented them as younger, healthier, or more beautiful than they were in life. A portrait of Isabella d'Este, the Marquess of Mantua, painted by Titian when she was in her early 60s, famously depicts her as an ivory-complexioned young woman of about 20. It is not exactly a lie, but it does reveal the slipperiness of the genre and its potential for mistruths and even exploitation. Social outsiders—among them Jews, Africans, and Turks—were particularly vulnerable to the deceptive, destructive potential of representation.¹⁶

Resemblance requires an act of recognition on the part of the viewer—familiarity with forms and categories that allows us to make sense of what we see, beyond the subject and the form of delineation, and to declare the image a portrait.¹⁷ An old photograph uncovered at a New York City flea market, detached from any name or fixed context of memory, may once have been a portrait, but



Figure 8.1 Venetian, *Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent Wearing the Jewel-Studded Helmet*, c. 1540–50, woodcut, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1942, 42.41.1.

it is fair to rethink that label if we can no longer recognize the sitter. Elements of its composition may slot it into that category for us: a person sitting formally, face toward the camera, against a neutral background or the too-crisp blue skies of yearbook pictures gone by. But is that what makes something a portrait—format and intention, if the name and biographical details are gone? Another

example inverts that scenario. Imagine that, at that same flea market, I've come upon a casual snapshot of an individual, taken apparently at random on a nearby city street. The person is anonymous, the picture generally documentary and captured spontaneously, in the moment. Form, intention, and content all push away from the label "portrait," but the image speaks to me and I buy it. What if, some years later, I pull out this photograph and realize that the face in the picture belongs to someone now famous—say, Barack Obama, captured strolling down a street near Columbia University, decades earlier. Now we have a name for a face and even some biographical details. This is a portrayal of a particular person, to be sure, but it is far less clearly a portrait.

In short, it does not take much effort to upend the assessment by many of the National Gallery's experts that the category "portrait" is clear-cut and stable. Yet this was never really the critical argument in the case of Gentile's painting of Mehmed anyway; its classification as a portrait was not in dispute. It was never taken for a fantasy picture of an anonymous Turkish ruler, or even a fictionalized representation of a historical personage; nor did it matter that no one alive knew the Sultan's face. Everything about the picture, from its format to its striking specificity, confirmed its status as portrait. This fact complicated things for the museum and its trustees. For even if opacity and instability were allowed into the interpretation of "portrait," and even if we were to rule out the assessment that a portrait remains a portrait forever, did not Gentile's picture of Mehmed still fall quite clearly under Sir Austen Henry Layard's unfortunate heading of "other portraits" and rightfully belong to Major Layard, the claimant, as agents for the National Gallery themselves had admitted?

Portraiture and the "Galleria Layard"

The National Gallery tried to redirect the worrying trajectory of expert testimony by uncovering how Austen Henry Layard himself thought about Gentile's canvas. For this it dug deep, looking past his will and correspondence with the Gallery to a host of other sources that would reveal his attitudes toward portraits more generally. A handwritten note surviving in the museum's archives requests information on all cases in which the collector used the term "portrait" as a subcategory of "picture." It is filed with a typed, bound copy of the many letters Layard exchanged with his dealer-consultant Giovanni Morelli, a collection matched elsewhere in the archives by a full transcript of his communications with Louis Thuasne, who had published a book about Gentile Bellini in 1888.¹⁸

Layard's own handwritten catalog, in its green leather pouch, was labeled "Exhibit L."¹⁹ The methodical intensity with which the trustees sought to complicate the easy notion of "once a portrait, always a portrait" is impressive, particularly in light of such other, ongoing matters as Italian patrimony claims and the outbreak of war. With steely focus, the trustees aimed to demonstrate a nuanced understanding of portraiture on the part of Layard that separated historical images like those of Mehmed from modern family pictures, thus justifying a similar split in the resolution of Layard's troublesome will.

Increasingly anxious about this document and the obstacles it was creating, the National Gallery hired a well-connected legal team to review the matter and provide guidance. In early December 1914, their lawyers submitted an opinion to the trustees, confident that the museum was on the side of right but concerned that, because of the "unfortunate way in which Sir H. Layard expressed his intentions, the prospects of success [were] by no means certain."²⁰ They recommended three key lines of argumentation, and the importance of acquiring "[a]ffidavits by persons of high artistic authority" to support them. These all, in one way or another, pushed back against the fixity of portraiture and sought to complicate that category by examining Layard's own understanding of art as expressed in the display and publication of his collection.

Layard, the lawyers contended, had made his attitudes toward artistic classification abundantly clear. A man of "cultivated taste," he "drew the sharpest distinction between pictures by great painters of the past (whatever their subject matter might be) and the work of modern portrait painters," whose reputations were not yet secure. He kept the two sets of pictures—his historical Old Master works and the portraits of his family and friends—entirely separate. In Venice, the Old Masters were displayed "in his principal rooms; they were the subject of visit and study [and] cataloged as one collection; they composed the 'Galleria di Sir Henry Layard' of which photographs were taken and supplied." The lawyers bluntly concluded that, "his 'family and other pictures,' *i.e.*, the portraits of his family and his friends, had nothing to do with [his Old Master collection]." Records of the pictures he sent touring in England and Ireland in the 1860s and 1870s and those published in scholarly volumes supported their assertion: for Sir Henry, the classification of pictures was not based on genre or subject matter but rather on the artist, when and where he was working, and the extent to which his work survived the test of time. The lawyers proposed another way of thinking about this classificatory argument. Drawing on biblical history and the taxonomic language of zoologists, they wondered how a will might be interpreted that sought to leave a collection of St. Paul's Epistles (letters) to the British Museum.

Would a gift of “my family and other letters” to a nephew be taken to include the documents by St. Paul? No doubt these are letters, they state, but “the class [i.e. Paul’s letters] does not belong to the same *genus* as family letters at all.”

The history of art was on their side as well, the lawyers argued. No painter from the “classical period” considered himself only a painter of portraits. Each of the artists whose work was under debate portrayed varied subjects and worked in an array of genres. “The value and interest of any specimen of an Old Master’s work is quite independent of whether it happens to represent a given sitter or not,” they argued, and they encouraged the Gallery to use explicit examples to make this case to the court. As we have seen, Gentile Bellini was admired for his skills of lifelike transcription, and these were employed not only in portraiture but also in cityscapes, architectural renderings, and many other details of the visual world—as required by the contemporary category of the *retracto*, or retracing. Although the trustees did not follow through on this line of reasoning, the language used to talk about painting in fifteenth-century Venice supported it.

Finally, the Gallery’s legal advisors directly challenged the notion that “once a portrait, always a portrait”—or, rather, they suggested that the meaning behind this term could shift over time. Yes, they conceded, a portrait is, by definition, an image of a face intended as an accurate likeness, but the passing of years will alter the relationship between the category “portrait” and the image it embraces. Eventually, the living memory that links a portrait to its viewers disappears, those viewers no longer know or recognize the face depicted, and a picture once valued for its mnemonic power is thus repositioned. It might endure as a token of personal relationships, with “a special value of a sentimental character for relatives or friends.” But if it is of high quality, prized for its excellence or the fame of the artist, it will likely become a portrait less in the sense of recollection than as an artistic category. In such cases, it is typically the artist who is the key subject of remembrance, while the sitter is simply the vehicle for the display of artistic skill. In other words, the counsel concluded:

the word “portrait” has two applications which must not be confused. In one application it means a picture representing a given individual where the point of principal significance and interest is its resemblance to that individual and its power of recalling, through an artistic medium, that individual to mind. In another application “portrait” is a mere description of artistic subject matter.

The Gallery’s advisors acknowledged that this distinction was not always easy to draw, although they insisted there was no blurring of the lines in the case of

Gentile's portrait of Mehmed II. To define this painting "as a 'family or other portrait,' is much as though a man should attempt to bring in the first folio of Shakespeare under the expression 'my note-books and other papers,'" they scoffed.

Nearly a year after the 1914 Opinion was registered with the National Gallery, the Layard case went before John Astbury of the Chancery Division, High Court of Justice, who set forth his verdict on 11 November 1915, siding with the museum.²¹ Astbury declared that, for a knowledgeable collector like Austen Henry Layard, the value of historical portraits lay not with the subject represented but "with the fact that they are the Works of Great Masters." Gentile Bellini's portrait of Mehmed II was unusual because of the shared fame of painter and sitter and the rarity of the Sultan's representation. However, Astbury continued, "In an Art Collection [...] its main importance lies in the fact that it is the authentic work of one of the most famous and one of the rarest Venetian artists." Its identity as a painting by Gentile Bellini took primacy over all other categories of value, including the basic fact that it was a "portrait." It would thus be inappropriate to group it with the heirlooms—including portraits, testimonials, and other objects of personal or family value—that were clearly intended for Major Arthur Layard.

Major Layard appealed Justice Astbury's decision, asking that his uncle's will be interpreted based on the words used rather than an unverifiable assumption of intent. But in May 1916, the appeal was declined and the court ruled definitively in favor of the National Gallery. Major Layard's lawyers did not give up. They complained to the Gallery that the courts would now have to change how they interpret wills, and went to the Chancery with financial demands, eventually securing an order that the Gallery pay Major Layard £17,000 in compensation for the contested pictures. The Gallery sent one final letter to the courts in March 1917, acknowledging that the case had been closed but wanting to register a complaint about the settlement, the manner in which it was decided, and the amount of public money it had required. By 11 April, all pictures from the Layard collection, "including the portraits which were the subject of the lawsuit and excluding any family portraits or portraits of family interest that may have been there," had passed into the collection of the National Gallery.²²

Museum frameworks

All of this effort expended and yet, again and again in National Gallery records related to Layard's portrait of Mehmed, there is doubt about the quality and authenticity of Gentile's picture. "[T]he Mahomet picture [...] appeared to have

been repainted, and to be of very doubtful attribution,” wrote Sir Rennell Rodd, the British ambassador to Italy, in a letter of January 1913 to the museum’s trustees, suggesting they leave it in Venice as a gesture to Italian sentimentality.²³ Trustee J. P. Heseltine concurred, acknowledging that, although it was “the most famous picture in the collection,” it is “repainted and to my mind not a good picture, its value is historical almost entirely.”²⁴ While the Gallery’s legal team was busy crafting arguments that prioritized artist over sitter in order to hold onto the picture, prominent voices inside the museum took a parallel but opposite tack to dismiss it, asserting the portrait’s documentary value—regarding Mehmed, the Ottomans, and Venetian history—over its artistic one.²⁵ As a museum of art, they held, the National Gallery should attend only to quality works of aesthetic significance, no matter what curiosity a painting might provoke or how popular it might be. Today, when critics object to popular culture or kitsch in the art museum, they often rely on similar if unspoken judgments.

This is because museums themselves are classificatory structures, and the way they collect, display, and present works is not neutral or inevitable but an active, even intentional player in our understanding of things. Take any object—a shoe, a typewriter, a can of peas—and imagine it first in a history museum and then in an art museum. Now do the same with a portrait. Our assumptions about why it is important and why we have been invited to look at it will shift according to the institutional framework.²⁶ Museums help guide us in these priorities, even in something as simple as the ordering of label copy, as, for example:

Gentile Bellini *Sultan Mehmed II*
Sultan Mehmed II Gentile Bellini

The first calls attention to maker, in the spirit of an art museum; the second gives priority to subject as would be appropriate to a museum of history. In both cases, Austen Henry Layard’s name would probably come last, as the donor of the picture, although a history of collecting might choose to give him priority.²⁷

Distinctions exist among art museums as well. The National Gallery, London, currently uses the tagline: “The story of European art, masterpiece by masterpiece,” emphasizing a serial progression of great objects, while the National Portrait Gallery, just next door (or, speaking of hierarchies, just behind it if you are standing in Trafalgar Square), says its mission is “to promote through the medium of portraits the appreciation and understanding of the men and women who have made and are making British history and culture.”²⁸ Art historian Maurice W. Brockwell, in his 1912 *Morning Post* article following the death of Lady Layard, articulated the same distinction. After extolling this “magnificent

Bequest” to the National Gallery, he expressed hope that portraits of Sir and Lady Layard, such as those painted by Vincente Palmaroli (Chapter 5, Figure 5.3) and Ludwig Passini, would “before long perpetuate their history in the National Portrait Gallery”—so art to one museum, history to the other.²⁹ Today, despite its inclusive mission statement, the National Portrait Gallery holds twenty-three portraits of Sir Henry, mostly photographic and including a watercolor by Passini, and only a single photograph of Lady Layard. All sorts of hierarchies, not just aesthetic ones, are made and perpetuated through museum collections.

In June 1917, Gentile's portrait of Mehmed II was placed in the entrance hall to the National Gallery, welcoming visitors much as it had done at the Ca' Cappello in Venice.³⁰ The skeptics had been cast aside and the painting was not only accepted by the museum but showcased. This change in attitude and approach was driven by writers like Brockwell, who had few qualms about the Layard collection as they searched for a good story. Brockwell's notice in the *Morning Post* dedicated considerable attention to Gentile, “that great and rarely found Venetian master,” focusing on the portrait of Mehmed, its history, and its “foremost” role in the collection. Others echoed this assessment, singling out the portrait as Layard's “most interesting picture” and “a wonderful piece of character painting.” Many replayed the story of Gentile's journey to the Ottoman court, and the *Pall Mall Gazette* enthusiastically passed on the legend of the Sultan beheading a slave to test Gentile's representational skills.³¹ Repeated praise for and attention to the work in the press allowed its popular value to outstrip its “museum value,” and likely prompted the Gallery and its newly appointed director, Charles Holmes, to highlight it through exhibition.³² The impact of media coverage on the museum's actions foreshadows the celebrity pictures we know today and the feedback loop of attention they support—the Louvre and the *Mona Lisa* being the prime example and an appropriate one, too, as a small, dark Italian Renaissance portrait that draws attention through its mythology, but not infrequently disappoints.

The National Gallery stuck by Gentile's portrait for several decades, hanging it among other works of the Venetian School, including several widely acclaimed masterpieces by Gentile's virtuosic younger brother, Giovanni. Gallery guides called attention to it, although their praise could be damningly faint. Trenchard Cox, in 1930, deemed it the “most interesting” of Gentile's works to be seen in Trafalgar Square: the “surprise [of its subject] alone may well attract our attention to the picture. Despite much drastic repainting the portrait of the Sultan is still impressive.”³³ Scholarly assessments were similarly circumspect. One of the more enthusiastic came from W. Loftus Hare in *Apollo* magazine (1934), who looked past

damage to the picture to declare it, “doubly precious as a work of art and historical document” and “the only truly authentic icon of the Grand Turk that has come into our hands.”³⁴ We have encountered the term “icon” before, and it is worth hanging onto as we consider the picture’s fate in the later twentieth and twenty-first centuries.³⁵ Meanwhile, Hare’s recognition of its multiple values, as art and history, speaks directly to the issue of categorization that was at play for the museum.

Gentile’s portrait remained among the Venetian pictures until World War II, when its reputation was reconsidered and its circumstances again rethought—this time in a remote slate mine in North Wales. There, the National Gallery’s collection waited out the war in safety, far from the bombings terrorizing London. There, too, Assistant Keeper (curator) and future director Martin Davies waited and, liberated from his daily duties, found time to study and reassess the works under his care, including Gentile’s portrait.³⁶ His opinion of the painting was not favorable. In his postwar catalog entry, Davies describes “only traces of a very much worn and neglected old picture here, almost entirely repainted, especially in the figure,” and although the sitter is surely Mehmed, “the attribution [to Gentile Bellini] is not proved” and the work possibly a copy.³⁷ Back in London, a similar demotion played out at the Gallery, where the portrait was relegated to the museum’s Reserve Collection, a category that had been set up in the 1920s for works of problematic condition and questionable history. It was in a related also-ran space, Room A, where I first saw the picture in 2003. There it hung as a documentary object, a painted curiosity, more valued for its eccentric history than for its artistry, effectively erased from the grand story of Venetian painting told upstairs.

Art historians and curators have looked more favorably on Gentile’s canvas in recent years. Even as Davies downgraded the painting, the renowned German historian of the Ottoman Empire, Franz Babinger, maintained its authenticity and communicated his conviction in letters to Davies and an article in *Arte Veneta*. As a historian, an expert in texts not images, however, his opinion on the matter carried little weight.³⁸ In the mid-1980s, Babinger’s compatriot, art historian Jürg Meyer zur Capellen, reevaluated the portrait and also declared it an authentic, autograph work despite significant damage and repainting.³⁹ At the same time, growing academic and museological interest in the material history of cultural exchange opened up new ways of thinking about the picture and its sociohistorical place, leading to a number of loan requests, many of them international.

Typically museums will choose to keep a damaged painting at home, both to protect it from further harm and to preserve their institutional reputation. In the case of Gentile’s portrait, however, its modest “museum value” and dubious

reputation made the National Gallery less protective of it than of many of its “masterpieces,” and the portrait was permitted to tour.⁴⁰ The more it was known, the more it was in demand, and it quickly became a globetrotter, hitting five cities within the span of twenty years.⁴¹ Appropriately, this Venetian picture of an Ottoman collected by an Englishman was increasingly suited to the interests of an interconnected, late-twentieth-century world. Its fortunes had brightened considerably, and once again it was on the move.

In 2009, Gentile's Mehmed was sent on a shorter trip, across London, on long-term loan to the Victoria and Albert Museum, where it hangs in a gallery dedicated to cultural and material exchange with Europe between 1450 and 1600. Very few paintings are displayed here. The space is dedicated primarily to objects of trade (textiles, carpets, metalwork, glass, and ceramics) and includes a small installation of illustrated travel books and related prints, where Gentile's canvas is slotted into the narrative alongside portrait medals. Sultan Mehmed II is one of the stars of the gallery, credited often in the didactic text as a figure whose conquests and patronage helped seed a newly burgeoning “World of Goods,” as the installation is titled. The portrait's label gives primacy to subject rather than painter (Mehmed first, Gentile second), and discusses the circulation of both the image, via reproduction, and the artist. On my visit in 2018, I was pleased to find Gentile's portrait in this new and newly meaningful role, but also disappointed by the sporadic foot traffic in the gallery and the portrait's placement back by the elevator, off of key sight lines and somewhat diminished by the visual splash of the adjacent vessels and carpets, all shimmer and elegance.

This context has its own history and the V&A its own distinctive story, not as a fine arts museum centered on painting and sculpture but as a museum devoted to the applied arts, sometimes termed the “decorative arts” or “craft.” Its origins and development are rooted in the history of London, the Industrial Revolution, global markets, displaced workers, and a government-level conviction in the mid-nineteenth century that a museum dedicated to craft—the sort of objects that now surround Gentile's Mehmed—could elevate Britain's own production and spur markets and consumption.⁴² Every aspect of the institution was directed toward this task, from the efforts made to bring in working-class visitors to the organization of the collection by materials.⁴³ It was, in short, a museum built in the service of transnational industry and trade.

It is fitting to find Gentile's Mehmed on loan there now, given the context in which the portrait was commissioned and produced. Once again its meaning has evolved along with its shifting frame of reference (nor are these frames ever stable,

as the United Kingdom has now exited the European Union and must redefine its position in international trade). As installed today, the picture's primary interest lies not in its status as a portrait, its significance in the story of Italian art, or even its merits as a painting. The V&A categorizes it instead as an object caught up in the flow of people and goods that defined the early modern Mediterranean, positioning it as evidence of, and witness to, a culture defined by circulation. It is an interpretation that rings true, echoing Mehmed's worldly outlook as a wide-ranging student and patron of human creativity and a cosmopolitan collector. It also points to the role portraits played in the international web of politics and diplomacy, crafting the image of a ruler that could spread to the farthest corners of an empire.

Return to Istanbul

Situating Mehmed's Image Today

In December 1999, Mehmed the Conqueror returned triumphant to Istanbul in the form of a one-painting show put on by the cultural arm of the Yapı Kredi Bank (Figure 9.1). The exhibition of Gentile's portrait was a smash, provoking nostalgia and pride. Over 30,000 visitors came to see it in the span of just one month. Newspaper coverage was prolific and the headlines grand: "Second Conquest," "Welcome home, Conqueror [*Fatih*]," "Papa Fatih."¹ Visitors were equally enthusiastic, one of them telling an American reporter, "We have seen this picture so many times, in so many schoolbooks and on so many walls over so many years that it's really imprinted on our brains. Now it's finally here, the real thing."²

Gentile's picture—the real thing—had not been seen in Istanbul in over 500 years, and yet it was well known, deeply embedded in the national consciousness. Ironically, given the search for its traces that had preoccupied Ottoman officials at the late-sixteenth-century court of Murad III, half a millennium later the painting stands not only for Mehmed and his reign but for Ottoman history, indeed for much of Turkish identity, as a whole. Propelled by innumerable reproductions and a culture in which portraits of strong men have a notable presence in public life, it is an emblem of pride and aspiration but also of contestation for Turks in all sectors of society. Its significance mirrors the political moment and thus, like Turkey itself, is in constant flux.³

The meanings attached to Gentile's portrait now extend far beyond the rarified cultural interests of a fifteenth-century sultan, reflecting myriad attitudes and perspectives. Some of these are innocuous, the predictable expressions of cultural pride. Others are more charged. Not unlike their Ottoman ancestors, the Turks of today find themselves treading turbulent political waters and searching to anchor themselves safely between, or in comfortable relationship with, East and West. Much has changed since December 1999, when Turkey was given



Figure 9.1 “Fatih’s Famous Portrait Brought to Istanbul,” *Sabah*, 2 December 1999. Note the image at lower right, the copy by Fausto Zonaro discussed in Chapter 6.

candidacy status as part of its effort to join the European Union and Yapı Kredi welcomed Gentile’s painting to Istanbul. Twenty years later, pride in the Ottoman past is being harnessed as part of an inward-looking ethnic nationalism, a tool for making Turkishness a point of distinction and separation. Whether as “the real thing” or in reproductions and reputation, the significance of Gentile’s portrait of Sultan Mehmed II continues to evolve. Today, a painting produced in 1480 for one man speaks loud and clear to millions.

Second conquest

M. Özalp Birol is a buoyant man who ushers me into his office at the Pera Museum in Istanbul with open arms, colorful anecdotes, and a flash drive loaded with documents from the 1999 Yapı Kredi exhibition—a treasure chest, he promises me. Birol, who now runs the Suna and İnan Kiraç Foundation and its Pera Museum, was in 1999 the general manager of Yapı Kredi's division for Cultural Affairs, Arts, and Publishing, and one of the people who made possible the return of Gentile's portrait to Istanbul for the first time since it had left in the late fifteenth century. It is September 2018, and I have at last come to Istanbul, back to where this history began, in order to wrap up my research.

In the nearly twenty years since Birol and his colleagues brought Gentile's canvas to Yapı Kredi, the picture, too, has become a world traveler, visiting Frankfurt, New York, Boston, Brussels, and Istanbul—twice. A businessman with a strong appreciation for the power of art, Birol knows that it is not just the picture that draws me in but its ongoing trajectory, and that his exhibition jumpstarted its most recent world tour. We settle down into two comfortable leather armchairs and, with the ritual deep black coffee, he begins his story. People like stories but at the end of the day those stories become fact, he tells me. It is an apt metaphor for Gentile's picture and the narratives that get wrapped around and around it, ever tighter, until they themselves constitute the truth.

The truth in Birol's world, *c.* 1998, was that European museums would never lend a famous picture to a Turkish institution. Turkey was considered a backwater, he and his colleagues supposed, a cultural hinterland where great artworks could neither be appreciated nor protected. So when a colleague on the Yapı Kredi cultural board proposed celebrating 1999, the 700th anniversary of the founding of the Ottoman Empire, by bringing Gentile Bellini's picture to Istanbul, most people around the boardroom table scoffed that it could not be done. But Birol, a former athlete and self-described team player who loves a challenge, took up the idea and quickly found himself in communication with curators at the National Gallery, London, asking to borrow the portrait.

For Birol, one of the most important outcomes of his eventually successful loan request was the arrival of Turkish museums as players on the world's cultural stage. This required savvy and persistence, two things he has in abundance. Yapı Kredi's first request was denied, the painting having been promised to a traveling show in Britain, the National Gallery reported. Birol suspected another reason as well. Experience and some comments by the Gallery led him to believe that, in an echo of Italian attitudes from a century earlier, the British were concerned about Turkish

motives in asking for the picture, especially on the occasion of an important Ottoman anniversary. Might they try to keep it, making a claim to national patrimony?

Birol appended an immunity of seizure document certified by the Turkish minister of foreign affairs to his second loan request, guaranteeing safe travels for the picture both in and out of Istanbul. Gentile's portrait—like the painter, first, and later the collector, Austen Henry Layard—was now an officially sanctioned ambassador to the city. Through this loan, Turkey gained not only an exhibition but newfound confidence and visibility in the international museum network. Birol parlayed this success into major loan exhibitions from Mexico and Russia to the Pera Museum. He credits growing confidence within the Turkish art scene, including increasingly ambitious exhibitions, and the rise of new private museums in the early 2000s—Pera, but also the Sabancı Museum and Istanbul Modern—in large part to the Yapı Kredi show.

Internationalism was part of Yapı Kredi's vision from the start. In a justification of the proposed exhibition sent to the National Gallery in May 1999, the curator Samih Rifat described Gentile's portrait "as a point of intersection where, in fifteenth-century Istanbul, the fates of a sultan and a great artist met. [. . .] Rarely have art and power come together in history at such a critical crossroads," he explained. He promised the exhibition would "draw and thrill" Turkish crowds. "Who knows?" he added, "Perhaps even Western viewers have not looked at this painting closely enough to date."⁴

The installation at Yapı Kredi mapped out these relationships exactly as Rifat had promised. Gentile's picture was the only original work of art in the exhibition. A schematic compass on the title wall pointed left to painter, "*Ressam*," and right to his subject, "Sultan." Along those walls, text panels enhanced with large, color illustrations presented the stories of Gentile Bellini and Sultan Mehmed II, focusing on the training of one and the patronage of the other. At the center hung the fruit of their historic collaboration, cordoned off by a velvet rope and protected by a sheet of plexiglass. A picture taken during installation shows two uniformed security guards flanking the portrait, like an Ottoman honor guard in shiny Yapı Kredi jackets (Figure 9.2).

Nor did Rifat misrepresent the welcome the painting would receive in Istanbul. Attendance was extraordinary, with an average of 1,000 people a day crowding into the modest gallery space in Istanbul's Beyoğlu district between 7 December 1999 and 10 January 2000. Newspapers reported great interest among visitors and press coverage was heavy. Birol presented me with some seventy-five digitized clippings from Turkish newspapers and magazines, ranging from the left-leaning and now defunct *Radikal* to the pro-government *Milliyet*. Few give much insight



Figure 9.2 Two security guards during installation of the Yapı Kredi exhibition, early December 1999. Photo courtesy of Yapı Kredi Art and Culture.

into the reactions of ordinary Turks, although the event was described in suggestive terms as a homecoming, even a family gathering. It was a “big affair,” confirmed the art historian Günsel Renda, an expert on Ottoman portraiture who traveled with a group from the Turkish capital of Ankara to see it.⁵ Renda was part of a team planning its own exhibition at the Topkapı Palace Museum in Istanbul later that spring. A loan request from Topkapı’s then director, Filiz Çağman, on file at the National Gallery, strikes an anxious note.⁶ Despite the grand scale and extensive planning of the Topkapı exhibition, the upstart Yapı Kredi had scooped them; Çağman was clearly concerned Britain might not lend this precious painting twice.

Her worries were unfounded. Back-to-back loan requests confirmed “the importance of the painting in the history of both Ottoman and Venetian art,” as Çağman put it, and the National Gallery agreed to let the painting make two journeys to Istanbul. A Turkish newspaper reassured readers who had missed the Yapı Kredi show that “Fatih’s Portrait Will Come Again.”⁷ This ease in lending suggests something more than simple generosity, however, something both Rifat and Çağman allude to in their loan request letters and predicted a century earlier by protectionist Italians. For Britain, and for a richly endowed museum like the National Gallery, Gentile’s portrait was just one of many interesting paintings in their collection, and not a particularly outstanding one from the perspective of

connoisseurs. Birol and Renda both remarked on its second-class status in London, including its housing in 1999 on the Gallery's lower level.

In Turkey, by contrast, its importance was undeniable. In her loan request, Filiz Çağman framed this as a matter of art history. Gentile's visit to Istanbul and this portrait were "seminal," "help[ing] establish a tradition of imperial portraiture in Ottoman Turkey," she wrote. On behalf of Yapı Kredi, Samih Rifat made a bolder, more impassioned case for its significance to Turks: it represented a crucial cultural intersection, but it also stood for a historic failure. Gentile's portrait, wrote Rifat, is "the most tangible witness to a very brief Golden Age, in which the Ottomans [. . .] had the chance to come level with Western civilization." This "leap forward" was not taken until three centuries later, he claimed, when a modernizing Turkey finally gave up the religious superstitions that had shunned painting and began actively to pursue science and the arts.

The great Turkish writer Orhan Pamuk shares Rifat's interpretation of this cultural encounter as a spark that died, a bud that failed to bloom, and finds this failure deeply rooted in the nation's psyche. "In the Turkey of my childhood," he writes in an essay inspired by the portrait, "our lycée textbooks lamented this rejection of Renaissance art as a mistake, a missed opportunity, and suggested that, had we gone on from where we'd started five hundred years ago, we might have produced a different kind of art and become a 'different nation.' Perhaps."⁸

This interpretation of Gentile's picture—really of Mehmed's patronage—seems oddly chauvinistic, as though the many accomplishments of the Ottomans in the arts, sciences, and social spheres do not stand up to the those of the West. It is a view of history that sees the past through a forward-looking lens, one that frames work produced long ago through where it may or may not lead (a fine definition of nostalgia, one of Pamuk's favorite moods in describing Istanbul).⁹ It is also a view that made considerable sense in 1999, when Turkey was pressing its case to join Europe in the twenty-first century and be part of a world order characterized by unity and a shared, or at least mutually respectful, vision. Twenty years on, that vision is seriously fractured, but the gregarious cultural entrepreneur Birol remains optimistic: "Art unifies," he told me, "I still keep my faith in culture and art."

The legacy of Fatih

In the days leading up to my meeting with Birol, I scoured the streets of Istanbul for evidence of Fatih Sultan Mehmed. This is what I learned to call him in Turkey,

that or simply Fatih, “Conqueror.” I knew his presence was in the air, in countless entities given this name, particularly in the neighborhood of Fatih itself—site of his impressive Fatih Mosque complex and adjacent tomb, of Fatih Park, and of important structures and institutions that he established, including the Topkapı Palace and the Grand Bazaar.¹⁰ Fatih Park centers on a colossal bronze statue of the Sultan astride a leaping horse, his cape unfurling behind him as he soars past a bevy of turbaned advisors, his face unmistakably derived from Gentile’s rendering (Figure 9.3). The municipality’s logo also features Fatih astride a lofty steed, white against a red backdrop, recalling his triumphant arrival through the vanquished Byzantine defenses in 1453. Fatih the neighborhood is considered conservative, home to a more traditional, more religious sector of society than some other parts of Istanbul.

I was searching for Fatih, the man and his memory, for several reasons. I wanted to get a sense of what people think about him today and to assess how that impression fits into the historical cult of great leaders that marks Turkish history, including how it has evolved in recent years. More specifically, I wanted to find out what role Gentile Bellini’s portrait plays in this imagining, if it is this picture



Figure 9.3 Monument to Fatih Sultan Mehmed, Fatih Park, Istanbul, September 2018. Photo © The author.

that comes to mind when Turks call up Fatih and his accomplishments and, if so, what sorts of associations they bring to it. I was trying to confirm what I had frequently read and been told: “When people think of Mehmed they think of this image.”¹¹ It is, according to Samih Rifat, “graven on the collective memory of our people as a powerful symbol very difficult to eradicate.”¹² Pamuk concurs: “The portrait has spawned so many copies, variations, and adaptations [...] that there cannot be a literate Turk who has not seen it hundreds if not thousands of times.”¹³

A few quick internet searches confirmed that Gentile's portrait is the default image for Fatih. I found it on the cover of countless publications, including works of history and fiction for all ages—for children, for example, fronting a 2018 Turkish edition of *National Geographic Kids* and in a cartoonish copy on a book titled *How Did Fatih Sultan Mehmed Become a Great Man?*¹⁴ Textbooks regularly use Gentile's picture to illustrate the conquest of Constantinople and the Ottoman expansion.¹⁵ So too in museums: the portrait appears on didactic panels at Hagia Sophia, in a painted copy on plywood at the Topkapı Palace, and at the entry to the Panorama Museum, which is dedicated to the conquest of 1453 (Figure 9.5). It was engraved for the reverse of the 1,000 lira banknote in the mid-1980s and for a postage stamp in 1953, the 500th anniversary of the conquest.¹⁶ That was a rich year for reproductions. At an antiquarian book fair in Taksim Square, I picked up several commemorative publications that translated Gentile's picture onto cheap newsprint, and resisted the temptation to buy posters and a large-scale picture book. I and other would-be buyers were firmly warned against one purchase: a philatelic shop on the famous İstiklal Street had the 1953 stamp enlarged on six glazed tiles, elegantly framed and clearly marked (in English) “Not for Sale.”

Yet capitalism has not left the picture behind. Merchandise branded with Fatih's face, courtesy of Gentile Bellini, is easily procured by Fatih fans over the internet. Simple searches turned up a watch, a ring, a keychain, mugs, T-shirts, a cell phone cover, and a tote bag (I purchased this and carried it around Istanbul with me, sparking some amusing conversations). Online gift shops proffer bookmarks, magnets, posters, and notebooks. The most surprising item is Fatih Sultan Mehmed perfume, “a sumptuous smorgasbord of scent, harking back to the exotica of a grand, bygone time.” Crisp red apple, damask rose, tulip, iris, vanilla, ambergris, musk, cedar, and patchouli are blended into an aspirational scent for men and women, \$230 for 50 ml. The handsome dark bottle bears a stamped foil label inspired by Gentile's portrait of Mehmed.¹⁷

Not surprisingly, then, I arrived in Istanbul half-expecting to find the picture everywhere, popping out of souvenir stalls and even gracing official buildings.

Somehow I had invented a Turkish people so lodged in their great past that they were literally wearing it on their bodies, on clothes, jewelry, maybe even—dare I imagine it?—as Fatih tattoos (I had found one on Pinterest, based on Gentile's picture, so this was not out of the question). The closest I came to this fantasy were those same gift shop souvenirs, with an occasional pillowcase thrown into the mix. Yet the people I spoke with on the streets insisted I would find the picture "everywhere."¹⁸ One shopkeeper, who hailed from Van in eastern Turkey, told me that in his hometown you often see Gentile's picture in cars. He was not specific, but I imagined bumper stickers and icons hanging from rearview mirrors, much like the protective blue eyes seen so frequently in Istanbul—not a Fatih among them. A number of merchants told me they used to sell Fatih paraphernalia and that I would find some at the Grand Bazaar. I did not, although one antique shop was selling a fascinating, late-nineteenth-century painted genealogy of the Ottoman sultans with Gentile's picture standing for Mehmed II (Murad III's project of 300 years earlier again danced in my head). Several young women in a hip resale shop coveted my Fatih tote bag, pointing me to a line of clothing with Ottoman references—but, alas, no Fatih there either. In short, commercial evidence of Fatih's popularity on the streets of Istanbul was scant to none. Frida Kahlo was the trending portrait of the moment, far outstripping even the venerated image of former President Atatürk in visibility.

Nearly everyone I spoke with, however, recognized Gentile's picture and knew or claimed to know who it represented; so did the people who took a "Fatih survey" I developed online. Although there were some significant differences between this group and the people I spoke with in Istanbul, primarily in level of education and experience abroad, there were many commonalities in their responses to my simple questions: Do you recognize this picture? What can you tell me about it? What do you think of when you see it, and how does it make you feel?¹⁹

Of a total of about 140 respondents, 95 percent recognized the picture and 75 percent clearly named the subject as Fatih Mehmed. Many of the others identified him generally, yet tellingly, as "rescuer/liberator/savior of Istanbul." Half of the online respondents knew the painter was a foreigner, often with some precision, although this knowledge was limited to about 10 percent of those I met on the streets. Most confirmed the ubiquitous presence of the picture in Turkish life—seen in schoolbooks and corridors, on the news, at conquest celebrations, etc.—and some resented this. "I've been overexposed to this picture so [...] I guess what it makes me feel is a bit meh," wrote one highly literate respondent in English. The most common emotional response, particularly among those I spoke with in Istanbul, was pride, sometimes generalized to Ottoman history

and Turkish power but often pinned to specific qualities attributed to Fatih, such as his youthful determination, his military prowess, and his generosity toward the conquered subjects of Byzantium. This latter point, combined with some intriguingly contradictory views on his status as a “good Muslim,” is particularly revealing.

I wish I had recorded my conversation with a shopkeeper from the Kasımpaşa neighborhood, a 40-year-old man named Tahsin who identified himself as “a classic Muslim” and a conservative (Kasımpaşa is the birthplace of President Erdoğan and a naval district associated with Fatih’s conquering fleet). Sitting at a small table in his textile shop near the Galata Tower, a sophisticated tourist district in central Istanbul, he initially brushed me aside in order to finish his breakfast before it got cold. I persisted, barely explaining my errand before all thoughts of his meal disappeared and he launched into a dynamic monologue, in quite passable English, that ranged from history to politics to popular culture. “I love this guy,” Tahsin told me; Fatih “is the center of everything.” Indeed, he distilled Turkish history and its contemporary circumstances down to a debate around this figure. Those who do not like Fatih, he said, “do not like us”—by which he meant Turks loyal to the nationalist vision of Erdoğan, versus those whom Tahsin cast as non-Turks despite citizenship, namely “the grandchildren of Christians and Jews.” These people, along with “the left,” “blame everything on Fatih,” he explained, while those who love him do so “because he made our country.” “I’m not a racist,” he tried to reassure me, returning to his tea.

Without apology, the shopkeeper from Van echoed these views. The left, “the enemy,” does not like Fatih; the semi-religious tolerate him; and the religious love him—they put his picture everywhere, he said. For some, Fatih clearly serves as a wedge, a way of separating the Turkish citizenry into ethnic, religious, and political clans. Islam has a slippery place in that vision. Although many lauded Fatih for being a good Muslim, his orthodoxy was often questioned by the very same people, some claiming he had been buried with pagan symbols and others lecturing me on the old chestnut, clearly misunderstood even among the faithful in Istanbul, that Islam forbids any image making. In another persistent paradox, the same admirers who used Fatih to divide frequently called attention to his legacy as a unifier, to the tradition that he was generous with the people he conquered and tolerated other religions. This, the man from Van told me, is why he is beloved in Syria, where the Ottomans did not oppress people the way the Israelis now do. I hastened to steer the conversation in a new direction.

Fatih, in the words of an older man sipping a curbside coffee, “is complicated for Turks.” Indeed, despite the occasional “meh,” a large majority of respondents,

online and in person, spoke strongly of Gentile's picture and its subject, expressing pride, resentment, and a mix of the two. It is difficult to untangle their impressions of Mehmed from their impressions of the picture, but there is no doubt that the image provokes all sorts of meditations on the historical figure and his legacy, both political and personal. In her graphic novel-memoir about growing up in Turkey in the 1980s and 1990s, for example, Özge Samancı recalls a "very annoying poster" on a high school bulletin board, featuring Gentile's portrait and the caption, "You are at the age when Fatih conquered Istanbul"—at once oppressive, like the state-run educational system, and judgmental, like a disappointed parent (Figure 9.4).²⁰

Many survey respondents had similar recollections, sometimes softened with nostalgia: "It reminds me of primary school days," wrote one 25-year-old man. "I was bored and felt trapped in that authoritarian and religious environment. But it gives me a sense of peace as well." Although Gentile's picture is hardly militant



Figure 9.4 Fatih poster, from *Dare to Disappoint: Growing Up in Turkey*. © 2015 by Özge Samancı. Reprinted by permission of Farrar, Straus and Giroux Books for Young Readers. All Rights Reserved.

in tone—something Samancı pointed out to me, citing in comparison the likewise famous portrait of Mehmed smelling a rose (Chapter 2, Figure 2.1)—it frequently evokes conflict and discord. About a quarter of online survey respondents consider it a reminder of “the current political situation (hence this picture makes me feel angry)” and “the AKP,” that is, Erdoğan’s conservative Justice and Development Party. For some, this view has developed over time: “I used to feel positive things [looking at this portrait]. Now it’s [...] repulsive because of government policies.” Others agreed, associating it with arrogance, “unsupportable self-grandeur,” dark days, and Neo-Ottomanism.²¹ I wondered if the authors of these comments had felt the same way when Gentile’s Fatih had returned triumphant to Yapı Kredi in 1999. I wondered what had changed and what, besides the portrait, had stayed the same.

Neo-Ottomanism

One thing that has changed dramatically is the world of communication. In 1999, there was a nascent internet but no smartphones or ubiquitous selfies, no Facebook or Pinterest. Yet today it is in the ether of social media where Gentile’s image of Mehmed flourishes, as a host of replicas and memes that are amusing, disturbing, and illuminating. Although easily dismissed as trivia, these flashes of popular interpretation help us understand what the picture means, not in the commodity marketplace of bookmarks and magnets or in official historical and cultural messaging, but in the larger ecosystem of ideas fostered by individuals and their social circles.

Some of the memes are funny. Gentile’s Mehmed wears a pumpkin instead of a turban, or vanquishes a cartoonish Vlad the Impaler, aka Dracula. A body collaged with Mehmed’s face addresses a tourist on an Istanbul street, telling her that history began at the conquest of 1453 and that “Everything before that was a mistake.” Often humor is a gloss on the highly prevalent themes of conflict and triumph. The “Outrageous Ottoman memes” site overflows with send-ups of historical rivalries, Gentile’s Mehmed battling Russians, Greeks, Serbs, and the European Union. In one case, he is the treacherous Dr. Harrison Wells from *The Flash* television series, destroying an enemy emblazoned with a Byzantine shield.²² Less belligerent, more sanctimonious examples hold him up as the exemplar of a wise Muslim ruler, presiding over clean streets, clean bodies, and clean minds. In the vertiginous world of the internet, Gentile’s Mehmed is a rapper, a videogame avatar, and a super villain.²³ His portrait heads Wikipedia’s

entry on Mehmed II as well as a Fatih Mehmet Facebook page that is freewheeling and little patrolled, a site for all sorts of nationalist and Islamist-tinged postings.²⁴

This sort of riffing on history is particularly charged on the internet, but in the broadest sense it is not exceptional or new. Nostalgia for lost moments and an illustrious past has roots as deep as written history, and revivalist heritage is a growing industry as modern life disconnects people from traditional expressions of identity.²⁵ When hitched to political discontent and fused with nationalism, however, it is a sentiment that can head rapidly toward danger, toward a circling of the metaphoric wagons, excluding and often targeting those perceived as outsiders. In today's Turkey, a longing for the grandeur of the sultans and their empire—sometimes expressed through culture, sometimes through politics—is termed “Neo-Ottomanism.” As the wild world of the internet makes clear, Mehmed II as represented by Gentile is one of its most recognizable emblems.

Most historians and political scientists locate the beginnings of Neo-Ottomanism in the 1980s, although the term was first used by Greece, Turkey's long-standing foe, during the conflict in Cyprus that began in 1974.²⁶ Its evolution is complicated but can be understood by looking at a few key matters of Turkish history. Neo-Ottomanism rejects the doctrine of Western-leaning, scientific secularism that dominated the country from the dissolution of the sultanate (1922) and the establishment of the Turkish Republic (1923) through the fifteen-year rule of its revered founder and president, Mustafa Kemal, commonly known as Atatürk or “Father Turk.” Atatürk's legacy in Turkey is unparalleled even as the political scene has shifted, and although it oversimplifies the matter—particularly with regard to attitudes toward the West—we can consider today's Neo-Ottomanism a rejection of Atatürk's agenda, also termed “Kemalism.”

Religion is tightly intertwined with these conflicting political visions.²⁷ Atatürk regulated all aspects of religious life, from schools to publications to charities. He dictated that the call to prayer be chanted in Turkish rather than the original Arabic, and that the Qur'an likewise be translated. He himself was avowedly secular and promoted that stance unwaveringly. By contrast, politicians emerging in recent decades, including Erdoğan, have made open expressions of religious custom and faith not only acceptable but laudable—eschewing alcohol, wearing the headscarf, praying in public. A sprawling mosque going up adjacent to Taksim Square and Gezi Park will brandish a symbol of Islam at the secular heart of Istanbul.

But Neo-Ottomanism is as much about historical memory as it is about religion. Atatürk tried to erase the Ottomans from the Turkish sense of their past, moving the capital from Istanbul to Ankara and replacing traditional legal

and civic codes with Westernized ones. He also legislated myriad signs of Ottoman life out of existence, from the use of the Arabic alphabet to regional systems of weights and measures to dress, including headgear—although he never forbade the veil, his “Hat Law” of 1925 banned the fez.²⁸ When Atatürk talked about his country and its history, he focused on Turkish identity, cutting Ottoman institutions out of the record.²⁹ His view of Turkishness was based on an ethnolinguistic nationalism rather than an imperial one. Neo-Ottomanism, by contrast, has embraced that excised history, and politicians under its sway refer to the Ottomans frequently and with pride. Some of their doubters and opponents worry that this attitude could translate into expansionism, into a nation that might want to recapture or at least wield significant control over parts of its former empire.³⁰

Particularly relevant to the present story are changing Turkish attitudes toward Europe and its attendant values. What Atatürk most wanted for his country was modernization rooted in Western norms, yet his methods of achieving this goal were paradoxically insular. Despite his European inclinations, Atatürk did not once leave Turkey during his presidency and made it extremely difficult for his fellow citizens to do so, strictly regulating passports and criminalizing possession of foreign currency and foreign goods.³¹ The modernization project had to be controlled, he believed; democracy was a threat if it meant people might vote for other, non-Kemalist tenets, including Islamist values but also Western ones that could destabilize his rule, such as a free press and open debate. The army was one of Atatürk's greatest allies, and in the decades after his death the Kemalist military held to his legacy with tight, often deadly control. Kemalists wanted to be Western, but only so far as it did not threaten their power.

Ironically, toward the end of the twentieth century, conservative anti-Kemalists—the forerunners of today's AKP—saw a turn toward Europe as a way of pushing back against Atatürk's still overpowering legacy and wielding some powerful new tools of “political, economic, and social restoration.”³² Their tolerance for religious expression could be seen as a form of inclusion; their rejection of a Kemalist agenda under the control of the military also fit a more democratic vision for Turkey, in which the will of the people, not the army, holds sway. Neoliberal economic policies, which they hoped would enrich the country, demanded openness to Europe as well. In their own distinctive ways, conservatives and Kemalists both leaned westward.

This was the political landscape that greeted Gentile's portrait of Mehmed II when it came to Istanbul in 1999 for the Yapı Kredi exhibition. Its status as a bridge between East and West was easily expressed and easily grasped, both by

those who embraced Atatürk's legacy of managed Westernization and those who wanted to move in a new direction with respect to Europe. At the least, the portrait stood for a revival of strategic cultural exchange; at best, it emblemized genuine mutual respect.

Some twenty years later, the relationship with the European Union (EU) has changed again and, with it, the conservative political movement headed by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (Istanbul's mayor in the 1990s, prime minister from 2003 to 2014, and subsequently president). A rudimentary timeline highlights some critical dates: 1987, Turkey applied for EU membership; 1999, Turkey, was given candidacy status and moved forward on key reforms demanded by the EU; 2004, the EU voted to begin accession negotiations with Turkey, and Erdoğan, now part of the AKP, was an enthusiastic champion; two years later, in 2006, Europe quite abruptly suspended the negotiations; and, in 2007, a nationwide electoral victory for the AKP further provoked European anxiety over a rising Muslim presence in Turkish governance and the country's resulting ability to align itself with democratic reforms.³³

Over the last decade, Erdoğan, although still voicing interest in membership, has become increasingly resentful of European agendas and timelines, and relations have continued to devolve as he tightens his rule and moves closer toward autocracy (a controversial referendum vote of 2017 elevated him to the more powerful position of executive president). The key points of tension include concern on the part of Europe that Turkey has not done enough to support human rights within its borders, pointing to ongoing repression of the Kurdish ethnic minority, violent responses to political protests, and jailed journalists and academics; and Turkey's assertion that the EU exploits the strategic geographic position of Turkey without addressing its own domestic needs, using its territory for NATO air bases and assistance on the Syrian front but not coming to the government's aid when civic or economic crises hit, as they all too often do.

One response by the AKP and its affiliates is to assert Turkish independence and might by embracing visible signs of the Ottoman era—the very same historical traces that Atatürk tossed aside. Dress is again at play: politicians often sort out according to who wears a headscarf, or whose wife wears one, and who disapproves (the fez has yet to make a comeback). In the official realm, this trend includes supporting the study of Ottoman Turkish, a language difficult even for scholars, and the use of Ottoman references in naming institutions, from universities to housing developments. In architecture, it means state-supported restorations of Ottoman-era structures and the adoption of archaic styles in new ones. The sprawling presidential palace on the outskirts of Ankara, opened in 2014, is inspired by Seljuk-Turkish and Ottoman modes, and Erdoğan has made

regular appearances there, with a retinue of guards costumed to represent the imperial ancestors of the Ottoman Empire. In their exaggerated dress and frozen postures, they recall the figures that populate Istanbul's branch of Madame Tussaud's Wax Museum, where the visitor's first encounter, after being greeted by Atatürk himself, is with Sultan Mehmed II.³⁴

Fatih Mehmed is not forgotten in state-sponsored pomp and circumstance; indeed, he is its foremost representative. Erdoğan's government has made a point of restoring Fatih's tomb, and the president feted its reopening in recognition of Conquest Day 2018 with a visit and group prayer.³⁵ This date, 29 May 1453, was mostly ignored by Atatürk and his followers, save the 500th anniversary at mid-century, but it is now a centerpiece of the Turkish ceremonial calendar, marked by presidential speeches, parades, fireworks, lightshows, film screenings, and military displays.³⁶ Fatih's historic conquest is overtly, often bombastically, tied to current geopolitical events. At the festivities of 2016, for example, Erdoğan spoke to the crowds about the devastating war in Syria, calling out "the countries we call allies [for] turning a blind eye to the situation, and even supporting it"; the same crowds were entertained by the "Turkish Stars," the aerobatics squad of the national air force, made up of eight fighter planes.³⁷ Unlike the gentler images of Mehmed smelling a rose or sitting calmly behind a marble arch, this Fatih is a warrior.

Lest we forget it, we can watch Mehmed's conquest in movies (the most recent in 2012) and admire his valiant bravery and moral rectitude on television (two series, in 2013—with a trailer strongly reminiscent of *Game of Thrones*—and 2018).³⁸ Or we can visit the Panorama 1453 History Museum, opened in 2009, just on the edge of Istanbul's Fatih neighborhood. These are examples of what political scientist Hakan Övünç Ongur calls "banal Ottomanism," in which society at large picks up and repurposes governmental messages linking present-day Turkish identity with the Ottoman past.³⁹ At the Panorama Museum, the messaging is in some aspects heavy-handed and in others nuanced. A multisensory attraction set alongside the crumbling city walls where Ottoman forces once breached them, its main draw is the cyclorama, a 360-degree, in-the-round painting of the siege. Visitors stand inside it, at the center of the battle, the floor before them scattered with mock-ups of the tools and detritus of war, taking in the sounds of cannon fire and a military band. The Panorama Museum claims to be the most popular destination for Turkish tourists, and on my visit it was overflowing with people snapping selfies and posing children in front of sanitized scenes of mayhem. The Mehmed they see there is not the meditative one of Gentile's picture but another well-known version in which he is armed and ready for battle, mounted on his famous white horse.

Yet Gentile's portrait has a place of honor here as well. It is the first picture museum visitors encounter, blown up to mammoth scale on the entry wall, consistent with what I had so often been told, that this is the image of Fatih most recognized by Turks (Figure 9.5). The use of this restrained, contemplative portrait to introduce Fatih's military triumphs is not contradictory. Rather, it captures the Sultan's own complexities, as warrior-patron and Ottoman Renaissance man. It also underscores how difficult it is to pin down historical interpretation. For Turks, the conquest of Constantinople did not just enlarge their ancestral empire through warfare; it also brought civilization to a failing city. With his cavalries and cannons, Mehmed resurrected Istanbul as a global capital, the center of everything that mattered. He is a national hero, to be sure, but in large part because of his international significance and his status on the world stage, a rival to Europe and one that could match and even best it. A display of children's drawings inside the Panorama Museum on the day of my visit reflected these varied visions of Fatih, sometimes on a white horse, sometimes gazing wisely out of the picture frame. I was amused to see how many of the more sober images were based on that by Gentile Bellini—not memes, exactly, but another residue of his famous portrait, passed down over 500 years and onto a new generation.



Figure 9.5 Entry to the Panorama 1453 History Museum, Istanbul, September 2018. Photo © The author.

Journeying back

It is fair to say that I found Fatih Sultan Mehmed everywhere in Istanbul, and nowhere. So too is his portrait by Gentile Bellini widely known, but generally so—it resides deep in the national consciousness, even if its history cannot always be named or explained. Fatih's presence on the landscape mirrors that of George Washington in the United States, evoked in the naming of countless streets, plazas, and institutions; his face, by Gentile, is known much as most Americans know Gilbert Stuart's famous portrait of their first president, although likely they cannot name the artist or say anything about him. Opinions on what these founding fathers stand for are, in both cases, complicated and divergent.

In Turkey, Fatih's image exists in a context of public portraiture that is different from that of the United States, where personality cults have largely been avoided and state imagery generally remains out of the public eye and public discourse.⁴⁰ By contrast, the predictably stern, steady ruler portrait has a pervasive history in modern Turkey, primarily in the guise of Atatürk, whose image has stared down from the walls of every school, office complex, and government building in the country for decades.⁴¹ Today, displaying his portrait in a private home or business is a widely recognized way of affiliating with secularists, even as a larger-than-life Atatürk looks over Erdoğan's shoulder as he works in his Ankara office.

Erdoğan himself is highly visible on the streets of Istanbul, mostly on AKP posters. I was particularly struck by a banner, not far from the Panorama Museum, emblazoned with a bust of Erdoğan some three stories high (Figure 9.6). "*Teşekkürler Fatih*," it read, "Thanks Fatih"—a message of gratitude from Erdoğan to the Fatih-area electorate that supports him. Deep in my own quest, I could not help but interpret the banner differently, as an expression of thanks from residents to a new sort of conqueror, a new *fatih*. A misreading—perhaps. Some journalists and academics have taken to calling Erdoğan "sultan," although apparently his followers are more cautious, sensitive to history and preferring *reis* or "chief."⁴² To my eye, the banner seemed a monumental restating of Gentile's painting, its subject poised and confident, turned slightly to the left against a neutral background of floating political emblems and an honorific inscription. My elisions and interpretations are certainly not those of Fatih residents nor of the Turkish citizenry.⁴³ Yet all of us wrap stories around the things we know until those stories, as Birol put it, become facts.

Our journey with Gentile's canvas has uncovered scores of stories about the picture, each distinct, some contradictory, some implausible, yet all in their own ways true. For the sixteenth-century Ottomans who set out to find Venetian



Figure 9.6 *Teşekkürler Fatih* banner, Fatih, Istanbul, September 2018. Photo © The author.

portraits that did not exist and the nineteenth-century Orientalist collector who saw something of himself reflected in the Sultan's image; for the Italians who claimed the picture as national heritage and the Istanbul residents who read contemporary geopolitics on its surface, Gentile's portrait of Sultan Mehmed II expresses a reality unique to that viewer in that time and place.

So, too, for the art historian. In the opening pages of my narrative, I offered an explanation for my voice and my insistence on storytelling as the right descriptor of my task. Following the favored figure of the circle, as a form that brings us back to where we started, I return to this theme now, to my impressions and my methods. The confluence I see in a modern political banner and a 500-year-old

oil painting starkly illustrates the way each of us, historians included, frames the past through our own, lived experiences. Of course, historians must step back and assess those intersections critically, in an act of self-awareness but also to avoid as much as possible the biases they present.

Understanding my own responses to the Erdoğan banner in light of Gentile's portrait of Mehmed helps me imagine how, for example, Austen Henry Layard, might have filtered his thinking about the portrait through his collection of Assyrian fragments on the walls of the Ca' Cappello or the pleasure pavilions of an Ottoman sultan. This is a doubly retrospective exercise: I look back through modern geopolitics to Layard, who is looking back through his own historical moment to Gentile and Mehmed. Historians generally present events as moving forward, from first to last, but this trajectory—one I myself adopt even as I struggle with it—belies how we actually experience the past, as a network of ideas to which we hold fast and seek to place in a logical, linear order.

These lines of interpretation do not reveal themselves easily. The earliest moments of our story, concerning Gentile's stay at the Ottoman court, are remote, echoing out through the slim vestiges of survival: a set of anecdotes, a few documents and drawings, some ritual practices—as elusive as the Sultan himself, ensconced deep within the Topkapı's third court. Elusive but not beyond reach. The threads align, a sketch tied to a diary entry, a painting bound up with a precious album. The work of the art historian is to reconstitute this faded tapestry and render it legible, to restore its more shrouded passages to daylight even if some gaps persist. It is helpful to take a lesson from our studies of copies and restorations, recognizing the act of construction in which we are involved and accepting the distance between the past and what we can know of it.

As I, an art historian, examine Gentile's portrait, I see in it the expression of my scholarly and personal interests, of my efforts to determine how I can tell a history that is comprehensible but also respectful of memory's circuitous complexities. The more I consider the image, the more I realize that works of art are things born of ideas, but are equally—because of how we frame, think, and talk about them—ideas about things. Replicas, copies, descriptions, memes, museum exhibitions, and historical texts do more than re-present an artwork. They speak back to it, provoking it, in turn, to reply. The dialogue is ongoing and continuous.

Although the history of Gentile Bellini's *Portrait of Sultan Mehmed II* is a rich one, its general condition is not unique. All images exist somewhere between their physical form and the contexts in which they are encountered and reimagined. They are animated by an ever-changing set of meanings, continually mutable and evolving. They have a life of their own.

Notes

Chapter 1

- 1 Descent is part of the mystery of “Exploring Ancient Egypt” at the Field Museum, Chicago, and is a form of time travel in the case of archaeological excavations at the Louvre, Paris, the Museu d’Història, Barcelona, and Pointe-à-Callière, Montreal.
- 2 For the inscription, see Chapter 3 n. 50.
- 3 As with so much about this picture, there is no consensus. For the territorial interpretation—that the crowns represent the conquered realms of Greece, Trebizond, and Asia—see Caroline Campbell and Alan Chong (eds), *Bellini and the East* (London and Boston, Mass., 2005), p. 78; for the dynastic one, see Maria Pia Pedani Fabris, “The portrait of Mehmed II: Gentile Bellini, the making of an imperial image,” in Françoise Déroche, Antoinette Harri, and Allison Ohta (eds), *Art Turc/Turkish Art*, 10th International Congress of Turkish Art (Geneva, 1999), pp. 555–8.
- 4 Alan Crookham gives this idea full consideration in “Art or document? Layard’s legacy and Bellini’s Sultan,” *Museum History Journal*, 8/1 (2015), pp. 28–40; I am grateful for his generous assistance as I completed my own research.
- 5 For a full study of Gentile’s work, see Jürg Meyer zur Capellen, *Gentile Bellini* (Stuttgart, 1985).
- 6 James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, Mass., 1997), p. 37. The “contact zone” is a concept used by Clifford in “Museums as contact zones,” *ibid.*, chapter 6, pp. 188–219, as a way of rethinking museums and their collections, and is derived from Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, 2nd ed. (London and New York, 2008), pp. 7–8.
- 7 In thinking about mobility as an art historical concept, I have benefitted particularly from the work of Finbarr Barry Flood, *Objects of Translation: Material Culture and Medieval “Hindu–Muslim” Encounter* (Princeton, N.J. and Oxford, 2009); Eva R. Hoffman, “Pathways of portability: Islamic and Christian interchange from the tenth to the twelfth century,” *Art History*, 24/1 (February 2001), pp. 17–50; Avinoam Shalem, including his “Histories of belonging and George Kubler’s prime object,” *Getty Research Journal*, 3 (2011), pp. 1–14; and Jennifer L. Roberts, *Transporting Visions: The Movement of Images in Early America* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, Calif., 2014). In a theoretical frame, see Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, S. Rendall (trans.) (Berkeley and Los Angeles, Calif., 1984); Bruno LaTour, *We Have*

- Never Been Modern*, C. Porter (trans.) (Cambridge, Mass., 1993); and Stephen Greenblatt (ed.), *Cultural Mobility: A Manifesto* (Cambridge and New York, 2010), especially his, “A Mobility Studies Manifesto,” pp. 250–3. See also Elisabeth A. Fraser (ed.), *The Mobility of People and Things in the Early Modern Mediterranean: The Art of Travel* (New York, 2020). I articulate my own perspectives further in, “Mobile things: On the origins and the meanings of Levantine objects in early modern Venice,” *Art History* 41/2 (April 2018), pp. 246–65.
- 8 Arjun Appadurai (ed.), *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, (Cambridge and New York, 1986), including in particular the essay by Igor Kopytoff, “The cultural biography of things: Commoditization as process,” pp. 64–91. For implementation of these theories in history and the visual arts, see, for example, Anne Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello (eds), *The Global Lives of Thing: The Material Culture of Connections in the Early Modern World* (London and New York, 2015); Lorraine Daston (ed.), *Biographies of Scientific Objects* (Chicago, Ill., 2000); and Richard Davis, *Lives of Indian Images* (Princeton, N. J., 1997).
- 9 Aby Warburg, one of the fathers of modern art history, used the term *Nachleben*, “afterlife,” to describe the influence of an object in a later period—a more distinctly iconographical usage than mine, but a reminder of how terms themselves evolve; see “Italian art and international astrology in the Palazzo Schifanoia, Ferrara (1912),” in his *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity: Contributions to the Cultural History of the European Renaissance*, K. W. Foster (ed.) and D. Britt (trans.) (Los Angeles, Calif., 1999), pp. 563–91. Warburg’s influence can also be seen, for example, in Cathleen Hoeniger, *The Afterlife of Raphael’s Paintings* (Cambridge, 2010), and he is a key source for critics concerned with the lingering power of images across time and outside chronology, including Hans Belting and Georges Didi-Huberman. I thank the anonymous reviewer who pointed me back to Warburg and other useful sources cited below.
- 10 “Franks” originally referenced Germanic tribes but, by the Middle Ages, had taken on a much broader meaning.
- 11 Bronwen Wilson, *The World in Venice: Print, the City, and Early Modern Identity* (Toronto, 2005), p. 6; and Eric R. Dursteler, *Venetians in Constantinople: Nation, Identity, and Coexistence in the Early Modern Mediterranean* (Baltimore, Md., 2006), p. 11. In Turkey, it was only in the nineteenth century, with growing nationalist as opposed to imperial sentiment, that “Turk” gained significance as a term; see Gavin D. Brockett, “When the Ottomans became Turks: Commemorating the conquest of Constantinople and its contribution to world history,” *American Historical Review* (April 2014), p. 401.
- 12 The preferred term for scholars tends to depend on their focus and leanings, but a distinction made in 1453 allows for chronologic clarity in an imprecise linguistic field; see Daniel Goffman, *The Ottoman Empire and Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 6 n. 9.

- 13 Richard Brilliant, *Portraiture* (Cambridge, Mass., 1991).
- 14 Essential reading is Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of Images before the Era of Art*, Edmund Jephcott (trans.) (Chicago, Ill. and London, 1994). The shift in function that portrait-like images played before and after the “era of art,” more or less dating to the period we are considering, makes Belting’s study uniquely if obliquely resonant with my topic.
- 15 *Ibid.*, p. 4.
- 16 Mehmed’s wide-ranging collections may even have included icons; he certainly owned Christian relics, and was rumored to have asked Gentile to paint a portrait of the Virgin; see below, Chapter 2, pp. 27–8, and Julian Raby, “A Sultan of paradox: Mehmed the Conqueror as a patron of the arts,” *Oxford Art Journal* 5/1 (1982), p. 5.
- 17 Stephen Greenblatt, “Towards a poetics of culture,” in H. A. Veenser (ed.), *The New Historicism* (New York and London, 1989), p. 1; see also Greenblatt, “Introduction,” in his *Learning to Curse: Essays in Early Modern Culture* (New York and London, 1990), pp. 1–20.
- 18 For an overview, see the following essays in Lynn Hunt (ed.), *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, Calif., 1989): Hunt, “Introduction: History, culture, and text,” pp. 1–22; and, in relation to literary criticism, Lloyd S. Kramer, “Literature, criticism, and historical imagination: The literary challenge,” pp. 97–128. Most critical in the realm of anthropology is Clifford Geertz, who popularized the idea of “thick” description to indicate cultural practices in deep context; see Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, 1973).
- 19 “I am well aware that I have never written anything but fictions,” he stated, quickly clarifying: “I do not mean to say, however, that truth is therefore absent”; see Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977*, C. Gordon (ed.) (New York, 1980), p. 193. Important for my own thinking has been Foucault’s *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York, 1970).
- 20 Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (1987, reprint Baltimore, Md., 1985), pp. 43–5. There are interesting and fortuitous parallels here with the modes of fifteenth-century history writing and painting considered by Patricia Fortini Brown, *Venetian Narrative Painting in the Age of Carpaccio* (New Haven, Conn. and London, 1988), discussed below in Chapter 3.
- 21 White, *Tropics of Discourse*, pp. 83 and 47–8.
- 22 See Kramer, “Literature, criticism, and historical imagination,” p. 117–22.
- 23 For a brilliant exploration of the anecdote as a unit for historical amplification, see Joel Fineman, “The history of the anecdote: Fiction and fiction,” in Veenser (ed.), *New Historicism*, pp. 49–76. Fineman helpfully explores “story” as both an event and a mode of narration, illuminating the interplay between history and the historian.

- 24 The work of Michael Baxandall has been especially inspiring to me in this regard, particularly *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Style* (Oxford and New York, 1972).
- 25 Foremost among these is Linda Seidel, from whom I have learned so very much; see in particular *Jan Van Eyck's Arnolfini Wedding Portrait: Stories of an Icon* (Cambridge, 1993). Others include Greenblatt, as laid out in *Learning to Curse*, pp. 5–9; and Hunt, “Introduction,” p. 21, who, with a debt to Hayden White, describes the “story line” of her work as “the perpetual romance, the quest without end.” Of interest also is Goffman, *Ottoman Empire*, pp. xiv–xv, who opens each chapter of his scholarly monologue with an anecdote based on informed supposition in order to bring what he describes as dry, off-putting Ottoman sources to life. Harry Berger, Jr., in his compelling study of early modern portraiture, equates story with interpretation and aligns individual paintings with history writing: “The story a painting tells will never be more than part of the story you and others tell about it”; see, “Fictions of the pose: Facing the gaze in early modern portraiture,” *Representations*, 46 (Spring 1994), p. 87.
- 26 It appears nearly without fail in books on the topic of East–West interactions in the early modern period and beyond, for example in the popular histories by Lisa Jardine, *Worldly Goods: A New History of the Renaissance* (London and New York, 1996), p. 29; and Jerry Brotton, *The Renaissance Bazaar: From the Silk Road to Michelangelo* (Oxford and New York, 2002), p. 52 and pl. 2. Lia Markey singles it out as a “new comer to the canon of Italian Renaissance art” as that field is increasingly defined as “global”; see, “Global Renaissance art: Classroom, academy, museum, canon,” in D. Savoy (ed.), *The Globalization of Renaissance Art: A Critical Review* (Leiden and Boston, Mass., 2017), p. 270.
- 27 “History is always written from the sedentary point of view and in the name of a unitary State apparatus”; see Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, B. Massumi (trans.) (London and New York, 1987), p. 23.
- 28 See Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York, 1994), who prioritizes the meanings forged in the interstices between purportedly homogeneous traditions; and, more generally, Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, Anniversary Edition (Oxford and Malden, Mass., 2016).
- 29 A useful theoretical discussion as it pertains to the study of objects can be found in, “Roundtable: The global before globalization,” *October*, 133 (Summer 2010), pp. 3–19, which also problematizes the term “global” as too limited and self-contained. María Rosa Menocal, *How Muslims, Jews, and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain* (Boston, Mass., New York, and London, 2002), moves some of this theory into practice. Also helpful are many of the studies of mobility cited above, Chapter 1 n. 7.

- 30 Among these scholars, in different veins, are Mary Roberts, *Istanbul Exchanges: Ottomans, Orientalists, and Nineteenth-Century Visual Culture* (Berkeley, Calif., 2015), who examines what she calls “cultural traffic,” with Istanbul as the node; Hans Belting and his notion of *Blickwechsel* (shifting focus/exchange of glances), implemented in his *Florence and Baghdad: Renaissance Art and Arab Science*, D. L. Schneider (trans.) (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 2011); and the foundational study by Mary W. Helms, *Ulysses’ Sail: An Ethnographic Odyssey of Power, Knowledge, and Geographical Distance* (Princeton, N.J., 1988).
- 31 Anne Barnard, “ISIS onslaught overruns Assyrians and wrecks art,” *The New York Times*, 27 February 2015.
- 32 Austen Henry Layard, *Nineveh and Its Remains, with an Account of a Visit to the Chaldaean Christians of Kurdistan, and the Yezidis, or Devil-Worshippers; and an Enquiry into the Manners and Arts of the Ancient Assyrians*, 3rd ed., vol. 1 (London, 1849), pp. xxiv and 142–3.
- 33 The status of museums as holders of colonial pillage is a highly fraught matter and considered more in Chapters 5 and 7.

Chapter 2

- 1 Chapters 2 and 3 revised and expanded by permission of the Publishers of “The Sultan’s true face? Gentile Bellini, Mehmet II, and the values of verisimilitude,” in J. G. Harper (ed.), *The Turk and Islam in the Western Eye, 1453–1750: Visual Imagery before Orientalism* (Surrey and Burlington, Vt., 2011), pp. 21–40. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own.
- 2 Gift-giving is another complex theoretical field, one tightly bound to work in mobility and migration discussed in Chapter 1. For a provocative essay that effectively applies such theory to practice, see Cecily J. Hilsdale, “The social life of the Byzantine gift: The royal crown of Hungary reinvented,” *Art History*, 31/5 (November 2008), pp. 603–31.
- 3 Domenico Malipiero, “Annali veneti dall’anno 1457 al 1500,” *Archivio Storico Italiano*, 7/1 (Florence, 1843), pp. 122–3.
- 4 Marin Sanudo, “Sommary di Storia Veneziana,” Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Venice, cl. CII, cod. 157(=7771), fol. 88r; transcribed in Meyer zur Capellen, *Gentile Bellini*, p. 109.
- 5 This pairing of images itself provokes a recalibration of our assumptions about regionalism and style, the Ottoman portrait bearing many of the qualities associated with progressive Western painting (volume, shading, illusionism) and the Venetian one evincing a more static, decorative mode.
- 6 Mary Roberts offers a wonderful parallel to this investigation, also in the context of a mobile, multiply situated album, in “Divided objects of empires: Ottoman imperial

- portraiture and transcultural aesthetics,” in J. F. Codell (ed.), *Transculturation in British Art, 1770–1930* (Surrey and Burlington, Vt., 2011), pp. 159–75.
- 7 “Byzantium” is another slippery historical term, one that post-dates the Byzantines themselves but is used today to indicate the Eastern Roman Empire as it existed from late antiquity to 1453.
 - 8 In many ways, that fear remains. I address it in the context of nineteenth-century Orientalism in Chapter 5, and from a Turkish perspective in Chapter 9.
 - 9 According to Jacopo Tedaldi, a Florentine merchant with extensive experience in Istanbul; see Agostino Pertusi (ed.), *La caduta di Costantinopoli*, vol. 1 (Rome and Milan, 1976), p. 87.
 - 10 On the importance and even priority of military over artistic interests in Mehmed’s requests to Italian rulers, see Antonia Gatward Cevizli, “Bellini, bronze and bombards: Sultan Mehmed II’s requests reconsidered,” *Renaissance Studies*, 28/5 (2014), pp. 748–65, and “Mehmed II, Malatesta and Matteo de’ Pasti: A match of mutual benefit between the ‘Terrible Turk’ and a ‘Citizen of Hell,’” *Renaissance Studies*, 31/1 (2015), pp. 43–65.
 - 11 The most thorough and recent discussion of Mehmed’s Italian patronage, essential reading on this topic, is Gülru Necipoğlu, “Visual cosmopolitanism and creative translation: Artistic conversations with Renaissance Italy in Mehmed II’s Constantinople,” *Muqarnas*, 29 (2012), pp. 1–81.
 - 12 Raby, “A Sultan of paradox,” p. 4. Raby’s many publications, cited here and elsewhere, are fundamental to understanding Mehmed’s patronage.
 - 13 That he asked for de’ Pasti by name makes it likely Mehmed knew the artist’s work; see Cevizli, “Mehmed II,” p. 45.
 - 14 For a full translation and careful analysis of the letter, which was written by Roberto Valturio in the voice of Sigismondo and survives in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, see Timothy McCall and Sean Roberts, “Art and the material culture of diplomacy,” in M. Azzolini and I. Lazzarini (eds), *Italian Renaissance Diplomacy: A Sourcebook* (Toronto, 2017), pp. 218–23. The Latin can be found in Julian Raby, “Pride and prejudice: Mehmed the Conqueror and the Italian portrait medal,” *Studies in the History of Art*, 21 (*Italian Medals*), CASVA Symposium Papers (Hanover and London, 1987), p. 187.
 - 15 Philip J. Jones, *The Malatesta of Rimini and the Papal State: A Political History* (Cambridge, 1974), pp. 220–34.
 - 16 The attribution of the diagrams to Matteo is a frequent one but without clear evidentiary support; see Cevizli, “Mehmed II,” p. 58.
 - 17 McCall and Roberts, “Art and material culture,” p. 219, are skeptical about the presence of maps in Matteo’s stash, although the Valturio book would have been enough to raise Venetian suspicions.
 - 18 *Ibid.*, p. 219, and Raby, “Pride and prejudice,” p. 176.

- 19 The Turco-Mongol Timurids (c. 1370–1506) were centered in Herat during the reign of Mehmed II, and the Persian Safavids who followed (1501–1722) made their capital in Tabriz. Although their portraiture traditions are addressed briefly in Chapter 3, this rich artistic history is beyond the scope of this book.
- 20 On the relationships among the Islamic courts of the late medieval and early modern period, see the essays under “Early modern empires and their neighbors (1450–1700),” in F. B. Flood and G. Necipoğlu (eds), *A Companion to Islamic Art and Architecture*, vol. 2, pt 6, (Hoboken, N.J. and Oxford, 2017), pp. 805–955.
- 21 Influences crossed medium as well, so that the “international Timurid style,” particularly developed in manuscript illumination, impacted Ottoman woodwork, ceramic, and textile design. See Nurhan Atasoy and Julian Raby, *Iznik: The Pottery of Ottoman Turkey*, Y. Petsopoulos (ed.) (London and New York, 1989), pp. 76–7. More generally, see Sheila S. Blair and Jonathan M. Bloom, *The Art and Architecture of Islam, 1250–1500* (New Haven, Conn. and London, 1994), p. 232.
- 22 Raby, “Sultan of paradox,” p. 4.
- 23 On the location of Ottoman treasure in fact and in the European imagination, see Palmira Brummett, “Envisioning Ottoman wealth: Narrating and mapping Ottoman ‘treasure’ in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries,” *Oriens*, 37/1 (2009), pp. 107–22.
- 24 On the architectural treatises at the Ottoman court, see Raby, “Pride and prejudice,” p. 171, and Marcell Restle, “Bauplanung und Baugesinnung unter Mehmed II. Fâtih: Filarete in Konstantinopel,” *Pantheon*, 39 (1981), pp. 361–7. For Alberti on painting, in particular portraiture, see Chapter 3, pp. 38–9.
- 25 It has also been suggested that the circuit of information in this case ran from east to west; for this and a good summary of the Veneto-Ottoman wars, see Deborah Howard, “Venice, the bazaar of Europe,” in Campbell and Chong (eds), *Bellini and the East*, pp. 17–19.
- 26 On Mehmed’s embrace of both Latin heritage (*Romanitas*) and the late antiquity of Byzantium, see Necipoğlu, “Visual cosmopolitanism,” pp. 4–5.
- 27 Raby, “Pride and prejudice,” p. 172.
- 28 Although focused slightly later, the best source for this matter is Dursteler, *Venetians in Constantinople*.
- 29 Necipoğlu, “Visual cosmopolitanism,” p. 2.
- 30 On Mehmed’s likely knowledge of this work and the probability that he collected medals, see Raby, “Pride and prejudice,” pp. 173 and 185.
- 31 On Mehmed’s prints and how they may have come into his hands, see David Landau and Peter Parshall, *The Renaissance Print, 1470–1550* (New Haven, Conn. and London, 1994), pp. 91–4; a broader discussion can be found in Julian Raby, “Mehmed II Fatih and the Fatih Album,” *Islamic Art*, 1 (1981), pp. 42–9, and A. M. Hind, “Fifteenth-century Italian engravings at Constantinople,” *Print Collectors*

- Quarterly*, 20 (1933), pp. 279–96. The surviving works are today part of the Topkapı collection.
- 32 On the Turk in European prints, see Heather Madar, “Dürer’s depictions of the Ottoman Turks: A case of early modern Orientalism?” in Harper (ed.), *The Turk and Islam in the Western Eye*, pp. 155–83; Alberto Saviello, “*El gran turco* als ‘maskierter’ Tyrann. Ein Topos druckgraphischer Darstellungen osmanischer Sultane im 15. und 16. Jahrhundert,” in C. Schmidt Arcangeli and G. Wolf (eds), *Islamic Artefacts and the Mediterranean World: Trade, Gift Exchange and Artistic Transfer* (Venice, 2010), pp. 217–30; and Wilson, *World in Venice*, chapter 4, pp. 186–255.
- 33 Francesco Sansovino, *Historia universale dell’origine, guerre, et imperio de Turchi* (Venice, 1654 [originally published 1600]), pp. 104r–v. It is true that Ottoman rulers were wary of the printing press and the potential for spreading heresy, given the power of script in Qur’anic traditions and Islamic art. The first Arabic press in the Ottoman Empire dates to c. 1720, while the first printed Qur’an was produced in Venice in 1530. See Yale University Library, “Printing history in the Arabic-speaking world,” available at: http://exhibits.library.yale.edu/exhibits/show/arabicprinting/printing_history_arabic_world (accessed 21 December 2018).
- 34 Necipoğlu, “Visual cosmopolitanism,” pp. 19–21, argues for the ambivalence of the image and in particular the headgear, which could have positive associations with representations of Alexander the Great.
- 35 According to the diarist-senator Domenico Malipiero, this threat was made against anyone who called his envoy in Venice “ambassador of the Turk”—Mehmed insisted on “of the Signor [Lord]”; see his “Annali veneti,” p. 122. For the inscription, see Chapter 1, p. 2 and Chapter 3 n. 50.
- 36 *Şan’at* is related to the Arabic *şinā-a*, referring to something made, a way of working, and a profession; see Adam Mestyan, “Arabic lexicography and European aesthetics: The origin of *fann*,” *Muqarnas*, 28 (2011), p. 76.
- 37 Much like Gentile’s London portrait, its whereabouts after Mehmed’s death are unclear, although it resurfaced earlier than the painting, discovered in 1728 in Smyrna by an agent to the French king; see Bernhard Degenhart and Annegrit Schmitt, *Jacopo Bellini: The Louvre Album of Drawings*, F. Mecklenburg (trans.) (New York, 1984), p. 11.
- 38 Gentile traveled on a galley captained by Melchior Trevisano that departed Venice in early September 1479; see Raby, “Pride and prejudice,” pp. 178–84.
- 39 The most comprehensive source is Gülru Necipoğlu, *Architecture, Ceremonial, and Power: The Topkapı Palace in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries* (Cambridge, Mass., 1991). Much of Mehmed’s original building has been altered, but Necipoğlu makes a strong case for continuity of design and its connection to ongoing ritual.
- 40 See Julian Raby, “The Serenissima and the Sublime Porte: Art in the art of diplomacy, 1453–1600,” in S. Carboni (ed.), *Venice and the Islamic World, 828–1797*

- (New York and New Haven, Conn., 2007), pp. 90–119; in the same volume, see also Walter Denny, “Oriental carpets and textiles in Venice,” pp. 187–9, on why elite Ottomans would prefer Venetian fabrics to local ones.
- 41 Raby, “The Serenissima,” p. 96; these particular examples are from the early 1530s.
- 42 Cited in Necipoğlu, *Architecture, Ceremonial, and Power*, pp. 97–8.
- 43 “Gentile tu sai che sempre t’ho detto, che tu puoi parlar con me, pur che tu dica la verità, si che dimmi quello che ti pare”; Giovanni Maria Angiolello [Donado da Lezze], *Historia Turchesca (1300–1514), publicată, adnotată, împreună cu o introducere de Dr. I. Ursu* (Bucharest, 1910), p. 121. This text is now given to Angiolello, not da Lezze.
- 44 This drawing, in the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston, has been attributed less convincingly to Costanzo da Ferrara, another Italian at the Ottoman court who made portrait medals of Mehmed; see the entry by Alan Chong in Campbell and Chong (eds), *Bellini and the East*, p. 122. The somewhat later inscription gives it to a “well-known European master”; see Necipoğlu, “Visual cosmopolitanism,” p. 39. Other drawings related to Gentile’s journey survive but are generally considered copies of lost originals, likely produced in his workshop.
- 45 On drawings as evidence of special access for Gentile, see Necipoğlu, “Visual cosmopolitanism,” p. 26.
- 46 See the arguments put forth in Raby, “Sultan of paradox.”
- 47 Alan Chong, “Gentile Bellini in Istanbul: Myths and misunderstandings,” in Campbell and Chong (eds), *Bellini and the East*, p. 110.
- 48 Raby, “Sultan of paradox,” p. 5.
- 49 Şiblizade Ahmed trained with Sinan Beg, who had himself worked with a European artist either at the Ottoman court or abroad. Sinan Beg was a court interpreter and so successful as a mediator that he was sent on an ambassadorial mission to Venice while Gentile was in Istanbul. Necipoğlu argues that the hybrid forms in this portrait are intentional borrowings, characteristic of Mehmed’s multiculturalism; see “Visual cosmopolitanism,” pp. 4 and 38–9.
- 50 On stately imagery and notions of kingship in another context, see Alejandro Cañeque, *The King’s Living Image: The Culture and Politics of Viceregal Power in Colonial Mexico* (New York, 2004).
- 51 On the question of canvas versus panel, see David Young Kim, “Gentile in red,” *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance*, 18/1 (Spring 2015), pp. 186–7. I am grateful to Jill Dunkerton for responding to my conservation questions by email on 23 April 2019.
- 52 For the inscription, see Chapter 1, p. 2 and Chapter 3 n. 50. Necipoğlu suggests that all portraits produced for Mehmed by Westerners may have had such a purpose, but this interpretation undermines the evident fluidity and sophistication of Mehmed’s patronage; see “The serial portraits of Ottoman sultans in comparative

- perspective,” in S. Kangal (ed.), *The Sultan’s Portrait: Picturing the House of Osman* (Istanbul, 2000), p. 30.
- 53 See the summary and analysis of these medals in Necipoğlu, “Visual cosmopolitanism,” pp. 30–4. A catalog entry by Trinita Kennedy places production in Istanbul and attributes the casting to Bartolomeo Bellano, in Carboni (ed.), *Venice and the Islamic World*, p. 331.
- 54 Kim considers such duality a feature of many ruler portraits almost by definition, but argues that, in this case, it is enhanced by the otherness of the subject—meaning Mehmed’s face stands both for an entire foreign populace and a particularized subject; see Kim, “Gentile in red,” p. 191.
- 55 Necipoğlu, *Architecture, Ceremonial, and Power*, p. 135.
- 56 See Cevilzi, “Bellini,” pp. 751–3, on the probability that Bellano actually made it to Istanbul. The evidence is thin but persuasive, like so many of the historical clues from this time and place.

Chapter 3

- 1 Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting*, C. Grayson (trans.) and M. Kemp (intro.) (London, 1991), p. 64. Alberti’s treatise was published in 1435 in Latin and a year later in Italian, a sign of its popularity and widespread influence. On Alberti’s reinvention of Ovid’s Narcissus, see Cristelle Baskins, “Echoing Narcissus in Alberti’s *Della pittura*,” *Oxford Art Journal*, 16/1 (1993), pp. 25–33.
- 2 John Pope-Hennessy, *The Portrait in the Renaissance*, The Andrew W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts, Bollingen Series, 35/12 (New York, 1966), pp. 50–1.
- 3 Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite degli eccellenti pittori, scultori e architetti* [1568], vol. 5 (Florence, 1849), p. 14. On the status of images in early Islam as a question of sociology rather than doctrine, and in terms of context, religious versus secular, see Oleg Grabar, “Islamic attitudes toward the arts,” in his *The Formation of Islamic Art*, rev. ed. (New Haven, Conn. and London, 1987), chapter 4, pp. 72–98; and Terry Allen, “Aniconism and figural representation in Islamic art,” in his *Five Essays on Islamic Art* (Sebastopol, Calif., 1986), chapter 2, pp. 17–37.
- 4 Its enduring reputation as a key work in the transition from stereotype to naturalism can be found in the span between, for example, Armenag Sakisian, “The portrait of Mehmet II,” *Burlington Magazine*, 74 (1939), pp. 172–81, and Beyza Uzun, “Three Italian portraits of the Ottoman Sultan,” MA thesis, University of Kent, 2015, p. 14.
- 5 By contrast, and more sensitively with regard to the matter of naturalism, Stefano Carboni suggests in the context of medals that an “older” sultan may have been read in the Venetian context as wise and experienced; see Carboni (ed.), *Venice and the Islamic World*, figs 9–10 and p. 331.

- 6 Expanded European exploration and the rise of printing in the sixteenth century were key factors, but the question of what was held to be “true” and why is extremely complicated and in need of further research. With regard to Venice and the Ottomans, many relevant matters are considered in Wilson, *World in Venice*. For related concerns in a different context, see Steven Shapin, *A Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England* (Chicago, Ill., 1994), and Brendan M. Dooley, *The Social History of Skepticism: Experience and Doubt in Early Modern Culture* (Baltimore, Md., 1999).
- 7 Kim, “Gentile in red,” pp. 178–86.
- 8 Carlo Ridolfi, *Le meraviglie dell'arte, ovvero le vite de gl'illustri pittori veneti, e dello stato*, vol. 1 (Venice, 1648), pp. 38–45.
- 9 On the connection with Seneca, see Franz Babinger, *Mehmed the Conqueror and His Time*, R. Manheim (trans.) (Princeton, N.J., 1978 [German ed., 1953]), p. 429. The general theme of beheading was a popular one; see Jacopo Bellini's drawing, Chapter 2, Figure 2.7.
- 10 See Chapter 3 n. 23. I thank the anonymous reviewer for reminders about the perils of language describing violence committed in the name of religion.
- 11 Angiolello [da Lezze], *Historia Turchesca*, pp. 120–1; on Angiolello, see Chapter 2 n. 43.
- 12 Raby, “Sultan of paradox,” pp. 3–4. Although watermarks on the paper suggest an appropriate date, the attribution of the sketchbook to Mehmed is not certain; see Necipoğlu, “Visual cosmopolitanism,” p. 63 n. 76.
- 13 Raby, “Pride and prejudice,” p.172.
- 14 I avoid the term “realism” altogether, as it is too tightly associated with the post-Romantic movement of the nineteenth century; it also asserts a visual “reality” that is called into question by these very critics. Key sources on the matter of naturalism are E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (New York, 1960), which introduced perception into what he called “the riddle of style”; W. J. T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago, Ill., 1986), pp. 7–46; and David Summers, *The Judgment of Sense: Renaissance Naturalism and the Rise of Aesthetics* (New York and Cambridge, 1987), in particular pp. 4–9. More focused and also helpful is Joost Keizer, “Portrait and imprint in fifteenth-century Italy,” *Art History*, 38/1 (February 2015), pp. 11–37.
- 15 See the useful synopsis of art historical inquiries into naturalism in Noa Turel, “Living pictures: Rereading ‘au vif,’ 1350–1550,” *Gesta*, 50/2 (2011), pp. 163–4. On perspective as an expression and tool of Western ideologies, see Mitchell, *Iconology*, pp. 37–40, and Belting, *Florence and Baghdad*, pp. 42–7. Most thorough and compelling in the Ottoman context is Necipoğlu, “The scrutinizing gaze in the aesthetics of Islamic visual cultures: Sight, insight, desire,” *Muqarnas: Gazing Otherwise: Modalities of Seeing in and Beyond the Lands of Islam*, 32 (2015),

- pp. 23–61; this article is to a large extent a critical response to Belting, *Florence and Baghdad*.
- 16 On the notion of form matching poetic sensibilities, see Amy S. Landau, “From poet to painter: Allegory and metaphor in a seventeenth-century Persian painting by Muhammad Zaman, master of *farangī-sāzī*,” *Muqarnas*, 28 (2011), pp. 111–12. *Farangī-sāzī* translates as “making in European style,” which Landau productively examines in the context of encounters as opposed to influence. I thank the anonymous reviewer for this reference.
- 17 For Alberti, these are outline, or circumscription; the relationship of surfaces, or composition; and color, or the reception of light; see *On Painting*, pp. 60–5.
- 18 Reflecting this complexity is the extensive contemporary scholarship that considers it. Essential among these are the studies, established and more recent, of Samuel Y. Edgerton, Jr., *The Renaissance Rediscovery of Linear Perspective* (New York, 1975) and *The Mirror, the Window, and the Telescope: How Renaissance Linear Perspective Changed Our Vision of the Universe* (Ithaca, N. Y., 2009). Although criticized for misperceptions of Islamic science and imagery (see above, Chapter 3 n. 15), an important effort at crossing cultural traditions by thinking through perspective is Belting, *Florence and Baghdad*.
- 19 Alberti, *On Painting*, p. 60.
- 20 The intercepted letter of 1461 from Sigismondo Malatesta to the sultan (Chapter 2, pp. 19–20) compared Mehmed directly to Alexander in the context of portraits and patronage:
- It is the mark of ingenious and gifted souls to take delight in the nearly breathing likeness of nature fashioned by human hands [. . .]. Alexander the Great of Macedonia, that incomparable king, very like you in this way, was one such. So it was that this king, for these very reasons, greatly desired that he not be painted or sculpted by just anybody.
- As translated in McCall and Roberts, “Art and the material culture of diplomacy,” p. 222.
- 21 Lorne Campbell, *Renaissance Portraits: European Portrait-Painting in the Fourteenth, Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries* (New Haven, Conn. and London, 1990); on related concerns in Islamic contexts see below, Chapter 4, pp. 40–1.
- 22 Keizer makes the fascinating argument that death-masks and other imprinted images were a technological response to a fear that naturalistic portraiture could not live up to the expectations set for it; see his “Portrait and imprint.”
- 23 The misunderstanding of Islamic attitudes toward representational imagery and naturalism in the West has been heightened by the attacks on the Bamiyan Buddhas in 2001 (Chapter 6 n. 32); on Danish cartoonist Kurt Westergaard for his 2005 depiction of the Prophet Muhammad wearing a bomb in his turban; and in 2015 on

- the French satirical weekly *Charlie Hebdo* for publishing images some considered insulting to Islam. *Charlie Hebdo* maintained its target were Muslim terrorists, not Islam as a whole.
- 24 The topic is complicated, as underscored by Jamal J. Elias, who describes a “negative-leaning ambivalence toward visual images” in the foundational texts of Sunni Islam (describing the Qur’an itself as more ambivalent than negative), and “a complex attitude toward images, particularly religious images,” that persists even today. See his excellent, highly readable study, *Aisha’s Cushion: Religious Art, Perception, and Practice in Islam* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 2012), p. 13.
- 25 Christiane Gruber and Avinoam Shalem (eds), *The Image of the Prophet between Ideal and Ideology: A Scholarly Investigation* (Berlin and Boston, Mass., 2014).
- 26 On the image, or *şūra* (meaning image, form, shape, as well as face and countenance), and its interpretation in Islamic texts, see C. E. Bosworth (ed.), *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new ed., vol. 9 (Leiden, 1997), pp. 889–92. Grabar also examines the relevant Qur’anic passages in *The Formation of Islamic Art*, pp. 78–81, and Elias addresses matters of idolatry and the Qur’an in *Aisha’s Cushion*, chapter 4, especially pp. 101–2.
- 27 David J. Roxburgh, “Concepts of the portrait in Islamic lands, c. 1300–1600,” in E. Cropper (ed.), *Dialogues in Art History, from Mesopotamia to Modern: Readings for a New Century* (Washington, D.C. and New Haven, Conn., 2005), pp. 119–37; see also Necipoğlu, “Scrutinizing gaze.” The relationship between portraiture, truth, and representation is considered further in Chapter 8.
- 28 See Oleg Grabar and Mika Natif, “The story of portraits of the Prophet Muhammad,” *Studia Islamica*, 96, *Écriture, Calligraphie et Peinture* (2003), pp. 33–4, and Gruber and Shalem, *Image of the Prophet*, p. 5.
- 29 This is not to say that portraits are defined by verisimilitude, rather quite the opposite; see Priscilla P. Soucek, “The theory and practice of portraiture in the Persian tradition,” *Muqarnas*, 17 (2000), pp. 97–108. David Roxburgh shows how “verisimilitude” might take the form of a compendium of details rather than a mirroring of reality; see his “Kamal al-Din Bihzad and authorship in Persianate painting,” *Muqarnas*, 17 (2000), p. 122.
- 30 Wheeler M. Thackston, *Album Prefaces and Other Documents on the History of Calligraphers and Painters, Studies and Sources in Islamic Architecture*, 10 (Leiden and Boston, Mass., 2001), p. 12.
- 31 On the Timurid tradition and its relationship to Mehmed’s patronage, see Necipoğlu, “The serial portraits,” pp. 22–31. For the case at the Timurid court, see Roxburgh, “Kamal al-Din Bihzad,” p. 122.
- 32 Priscilla P. Soucek, “Nizami on painters and painting,” in *Islamic Art in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, R. Ettinghausen (ed.) (New York, 1972), pp. 9–11. Mani was the founding prophet of Manichaeism, an important religious tradition of the third through seventh centuries.

- 33 *Mustafa 'Alî's Epic Deeds of Artists: A Critical Edition of the Earliest Ottoman Text about the Calligraphers and Painters of the Islamic World*, E. Akın-Kıvanç (ed. and trans.) (Leiden and Boston, Mass., 2011), pp. 275–81. Mustafa briefly discusses Sinan Beg (see Chapter 2 n. 49), describing him as a pupil of “a Frankish master named Mastro Paoli who flourished in Venice” (p. 273), but makes no mention of Gentile or other European visitors to Mehmed’s court.
- 34 Günsel Renda, “Traditional Turkish painting at the beginning of Western trends,” in S. Pinar (ed.), *A History of Turkish Painting* (Istanbul, 1987), p. 39.
- 35 Necipoğlu, *Architecture, Ceremonial, and Power*, p. xvi; and see above, Chapter 2, p. 26.
- 36 In a different context but extremely useful for considering how portraiture and likeness must be historically contextualized, see Stephen Perkinson, *The Likeness of the King: A Prehistory of Portraiture in Late Medieval France* (Chicago, Ill. and London, 2009), chapter 1.
- 37 Dating to 1490, this was the first published account of Gentile’s travels; if Gentile helped craft the text, it was another element of his self-fashioning, discussed below. See Jacopo Filippo Foresti da Bergamo, *Supplementum chronicarum*, as cited in Alan Chong, “Gentile Bellini in Istanbul: Myths and misunderstandings,” in Campbell and Chong (eds), *Bellini and the East*, p. 108.
- 38 On developments in the cataloging of ethnographic types, particularly “Turks,” in sixteenth-century Venice, see Wilson, *World in Venice*, chapter 4.
- 39 See Chapter 2 n. 35.
- 40 Venice dominated the mirror industry by this date, and by the sixteenth century the Ottomans were importing them and other glasswork in quantity; see Raby, “The Serenissima and the Sublime Porte,” pp. 102–5.
- 41 Or *miles auratus ac comes palatinus*; this commendation plays on the title of *equus auratus* and *comes palatinus* that Gentile had received in 1469 from Holy Roman Emperor Frederick III; see Necipoğlu, “Visual cosmopolitanism,” pp. 39–42. She notes how these intersections also worked for Mehmed, who demonstrated his knowledge of Western hierarchies and protocols by making reference to them.
- 42 “Gentilis patriae dedit hauc monumenta belinus, othomano accitus, munere factus eques” (“Gentile Bellini has given these monuments to the fatherland / Having been summoned by the Ottoman and made a Knight as a reward”). Two canvases painted for the Scuola di San Giovanni Evangelista were signed “Gentilis Bellinus Eques,” referring again to the Ottoman knighthood. On Gentile’s extensive self-fashioning as an ambassador, see Kim, “Gentile in red,” and for his translation of the extended signature presented here, see p. 163.
- 43 Brown, *Venetian Narrative Painting*, p. 51.
- 44 On the crowns, see Chapter 1 n. 3. Because this canvas was finished by Gentile Bellini’s brother Giovanni after Gentile’s death in 1507, we cannot be absolutely sure

- of the authorship of this figure. Brown suggests that Giovanni's contribution was "a question more of completion than correction," and documents from the Scuola indicate that, in its own day, the work was given to Gentile; *ibid.*, pp. 206 and 295, and pl. XLIII. Peter Humfrey argues that the figures in the foreground were defined by Giovanni. If this was the case, then the depiction of the medal is more a memorial than a personal statement, but is still essential to the construction of Gentile's identity. See Humfrey, *La Pittura veneta del Rinascimento a Brera* (Florence, 1990), pp. 88–94.
- 45 The architect of San Zaccaria was Antonio Gambello, who also designed the medal of Gentile.
- 46 William of Rubruck, cited in Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Chicago, Ill., 1991), p. 192 n. 34.
- 47 Giosafat Barbaro, *Cose da lui vedute nei suoi viaggi alla Tana, nella Persia, c. 1487*, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Venice, Cod. It. VI, 210 [=5913], f. 55v; Barbaro's text was published in the 1540s.
- 48 The historian, Marcantonio Sabellico, was actually describing the story of St. Mark's relics as represented in mosaic on the facade of San Marco: "la qual cossa quasi non se poria credere ali scriptori se questo al presente non se vedesse figurata in Istoria con mirabel arte nela giesia de S. Marco"; Sabellico, *Croniche che tractano de la origine de veneti* (Venice, c. 1506), as cited in Brown, *Venetian Narrative Painting*, p. 249 n. 5. Brown, in *ibid.*, pp. 79–86, persuasively demonstrates the power of the visual as testimony in Venice.
- 49 The city was "indescribable" even to the prolific chronicler Francesco Sansovino, who was never at a loss for words; see his *De governo et amministrazione di diversi regni et republiche, cosi antiche come moderne* (Venice, 1578), f. 37v.
- 50 In 1888, Louis Thuasne claimed to be able to read a fuller, although still fragmentary, inscription upon which this translation is based: "Terrar. Marisq. Victor ac domator orbis . . . Sultan . . . inte . . . Mahometi resultat ars vera Gientilis militis aurati Belini naturae . . . qui cuncta reducit in propria . . . jam proprio simul. cre MCCCCLXXX Die XXV mensis Novembris." Thuasne's reading closely matches the text in a woodcut of 1891 (Chapter 6, Figure 6.3). More recently, Campbell and Chong transcribed the inscription as follows: Left: . . . IL[?]ISQV . . . R / . . . OR ORBIS . . . CVNCTARE; Right: .MCCCCLXXX. / DIE XXV. ME/NSIS NOVEM/BRIS. See Louis Thuasne, *Gentile Bellini et Sultan Mohammed II: Notes sur le séjour du peintre vénitien à Constantinople (1479–1480), d'après les documents originaux en partie inédits* (Paris, 1888), p. 50 n. 20; and Campbell and Chong, *Bellini and the East*, p. 78. I thank Hérica Valladares for her help in translating this problematic passage.
- 51 See Louisa C. Matthews, "The painter's presence: Signatures in Venetian Renaissance pictures," *Art Bulletin*, 80/4 (December 1998), pp. 616–48.

- 52 “[T]he basic plot [...] of Early Modern portraiture [...] is that the sitter and painter were present to each other during the act of painting”; see Berger, Jr., “Fictions of the pose,” p. 99.
- 53 *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1989), available at: <https://www.oed.com/oad2/00255575> (accessed 2 November 2019). This physical, causal definition links the “trace” to the “index” in the schema of Charles Peirce, wherein the index bears the imprint of the thing represented, as footsteps in the sand or a photogram recording a shadow on sensitized paper; see Charles Sanders Peirce, *The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss (eds), vol. 2, bk 2, *Speculative Grammar* (Cambridge, Mass., 1931), chapters 2 and 3.
- 54 L. Campbell, *Renaissance Portraits*, pp. 1–2, confirms this understanding when he notes that *ritrarre* could mean “to reproduce” in the specific context of copying a face in the presence of the sitter.
- 55 Giuseppe Boerio, *Dizionario del dialetto veneziano*, 2nd ed. (Venice, 1973 [1st ed., 1856]), p. 571.
- 56 See Brown, *Venetian Narrative Painting*, especially pt 2, “The visual culture,” pp. 79–132.
- 57 The narrative action is hidden in the foreground, where a kneeling figure, Jacopo de’ Salis, evokes the power of a processed relic of the True Cross to help his ailing son; see Elizabeth Rodini, “Describing narrative in Gentile Bellini’s *Procession in Piazza San Marco*,” *Art History*, 21/1 (March 1998), pp. 26–44.
- 58 Brown, *Venetian Narrative Painting*, p. 146. Foreigners are carefully delineated too, part of a cross-section of Venetian life presented by Gentile.
- 59 Kim, “Gentile in red,” pp. 178–86, links this manner specifically to diplomatic reports, or *relazioni*. This association is also interesting to consider in relation to Roxburgh’s comments about naturalism in a Timurid context; see above, Chapter 3 n. 29 and n. 31.
- 60 Pope-Hennessy, *The Portrait in the Renaissance*, pp. 50–1.
- 61 See Susan Goldberg, “From the editor: To rise above the racism of the past, we must acknowledge it,” *National Geographic*, 235/4 (April 2018), pp. 4–6; and Rebecca Onion, “*National Geographic* has always depended on exoticism,” *Slate*, 14 March 2018, available at: <https://slate.com/human-interest/2018/03/national-geographic-has-always-depended-on-exoticism.html> (accessed 28 March 2018). More generally, with attention to the balancing act between Self and Other in the pages of this journal, see Catherine A. Lutz and Jane L. Collins, *Reading National Geographic* (Chicago, Ill., 1993).

Chapter 4

- 1 Dursteler, *Venetians in Constantinople*, chapter 1.
- 2 *Ibid.*, p. 176.
- 3 *Ibid.*, p. 83.

- 4 Angiolello [da Lezze], *Historia Turchesca*, p. 121. An inventory of 1505 includes a list of Western objects, described as “heathen” (*gebr*), that were to be sold to endow a new mosque. J. M. Rogers suggests this could have been another context of the picture’s disposal, in “Mehmed the Conqueror, between East and West,” in Campbell and Chong (eds), *Bellini and the East*, p. 96.
- 5 Some earlier histories suggest the painting was on wood panel—Gentile worked in both media—but this seems unlikely; email correspondence with Jill Dunkerton, Senior Restorer, National Gallery of Art, London, 23 April 2019. See also Kim, “Gentile in red,” pp. 186–7, on the relationship between support, medium, and portability.
- 6 Dursteler, *Venetians in Constantinople*, p. 176.
- 7 “Riportò etandio Gentile da Costantinopoli il ritratto di Maumetto, ch’è nelle Case del Signor Pietro Zeno”; Ridolfi, *Le meraviglie dell’arte*, vol. 1, p. 41.
- 8 See Chapter 6, p. 91.
- 9 Andrea de Robilant, *Irresistible North: From Venice to Greenland on the Trail of the Zen Brothers* (New York, 2011).
- 10 The horn was actually that of a narwhal; Raby, “The Serenissima and the Sublime Porte,” pp. 103–4.
- 11 Official efforts to distinguish nobles from non-nobles are evident in an interesting case of 1532, where witnesses to a wedding, both of the Zeno family, are noted in the records as “vir nobilis” and “civis”—that is, from two different social classes; Stanley Chojnacki, “Identity and ideology in Renaissance Venice: The Third *Serrata*,” in J. Martin and D. Romano (eds), *Venice Reconsidered: The History and Civilization of an Italian City-State, 1297–1797* (Baltimore, Md., 2000), p. 278. In the sixteenth century, citizens began to take on the role patricians had played in overseas trade activity, including in Istanbul; see Dursteler, *Venetians in Constantinople*, pp. 42–52.
- 12 Ennio Concina, “Fra Oriente e Occidente: Gli Zen, un palazzo e il mito di Trebisonda,” in M. Tafuri (ed.), “*Renovatio Urbis*”: *Venezia nell’età di Andrea Gritti (1523–1538)* (Rome, 1984), pp. 272–5. Concina also emphasizes the tight rapport between the Zen and Andrea Gritti, reinforcing the possibility that these actors were perhaps together involved in the transport of Gentile’s picture to Venice.
- 13 Wilson, *World in Venice*, pp. 188–90. Venice is rich with historic inventories that allow for these assessments.
- 14 Ugo Tucci, “Mercanti, viaggiatori, pellegrini nel Quattrocento,” in G. Arnaldi and M. Pastore Stocchi (eds), *Storia della cultura veneta dal primo Quattrocento al Concilio di Trento*, vol. 3, pt 2 (Vicenza, 1980), pp. 325–6.
- 15 A brilliantly disturbing example is Nicolò Nelli’s *Turkish Pride* (1572) that, when flipped over, transforms a turbaned man into a horned beast; see Wilson, *World in Venice*, p. 254.

- 16 Paolo Giovio, *Elogia verus clarorum virorum* (Venice, 1546) and *Elogia virorum bellica virtute illustrium* (Florence, 1551); the titles translate, respectively, as “In Praise of Illustrious Men” and “In Praise of Great Men of War.”
- 17 Paolo Giovio, *Elogia virorum bellica virtute illustrium*, Tobias Stimmer (ill.) (Basel, 1575).
- 18 This chain of resemblance and relationships recalls, in a secular context, the authentication of Orthodox icons; see above, Chapter 1, pp. 7–8.
- 19 The relationship of image to interiority in portraiture is helpfully problematized in Berger, Jr., “Fictions of the pose,” pp. 87–120.
- 20 Luba Freedman, *Titian’s Portraits through Aretino’s Lens* (University Park, Pa., 1995), p. 89.
- 21 On the complexity of artists’ signatures as signs of making and authentication, see Seidel, *Jan Van Eyck’s Arnolfini Wedding Portrait*, pp. 127–41.
- 22 Wilson, “Reproducing the individual,” chapter 4 in her *World in Venice*, pp. 186–255.
- 23 Linda Susan Klinger, “The Portrait Collection of Paolo Giovio,” PhD dissertation, vol. 1, Princeton University, 1990, pp. 39–44 and 179–80.
- 24 Emine Fetvacı, “From print to trace: An Ottoman imperial portrait book and its Western models,” *Art Bulletin*, 95/2 (June 2013), p. 248.
- 25 The fundamental study of this book, much relied on by subsequent scholars, is Necipoğlu, “The serial portraits,” pp. 31–42; and see with regard to the Venetian influence, Julian Raby, “From Europe to Istanbul,” in Kangal (ed.), *The Sultan’s Portrait*, pp. 150–62. On history writing at the Ottoman court, see Cornell Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire: The Historian Mustafa Âli (1541–1600)* (Princeton, N.J., 1986).
- 26 Necipoğlu, “The serial portraits,” pp. 31–42, and Raby, “From Europe to Istanbul,” pp. 138–41.
- 27 Seyyid Lokman Celebi, *Kıyâfetü’l-insâniyye fi Şema‘ilil-‘Osmâniyye* [1579] (Istanbul, 1987), p. 25 [henceforth Lokman, *Şema‘iname*]. Lokman explains and justifies the physiognomic approach in the book’s introductory treatise. See the important and insightful interpretation in Emine Fetvacı, *Picturing History at the Ottoman Court* (Bloomington, Ind., 2013), chapter 3.
- 28 Lokman, *Şema‘iname*, p. 25.
- 29 The surviving pictures, including a complete series of sultans in Munich (Figures 4.4a–c) as well as a set in the Topkapı Sarayı Museum in Istanbul, are likely copies of the originals painted for Sokollu; see the catalog entry in Carboni (ed.), *Venice and the Islamic World*, p. 308.
- 30 Fetvacı, *Picturing History*, p. 142; she is more convinced than I am of the influence of the Venetian canvases on Sokollu’s book, but I share her understanding of the intention behind acquiring these models as well as the distinctions she makes between factuality, representation, and resemblance.

- 31 Fetvacı, “From print to trace,” p. 253. See also Necipoğlu, “Serial portraits,” pp. 40–2; and Roxburgh, “Concepts of the portrait,” pp. 131–2. On the textiles, see Filiz Çağman, “Portrait series of Nakkaş Osman,” in Kangal (ed.), *Sultan’s Portrait*, p. 174.
- 32 Raby, “Europe to Istanbul,” pp. 151–2.

Chapter 5

- 1 The price varies from source to source, from “dodici [12] sterline,” to 300 Italian lire, to, as Layard put it in a letter of 1865, “peu de chose” (very little). Whatever the real sum—these figures equal approximately \$750 in modern currency—it was a bargain. See, respectively: “Original Mss Catalogue of Sir Henry Layard Collection of Pictures,” NGA, 7/292/13 [ii]; Aldo Ravà, “Una proposta,” *Il Marzocco*, anno xvii, no. 45, 10 November 1912, p. 1; and the letter from Layard to Giovanni Morelli, 24 October 1865, British Library (BL), Add MS 38966, f. 36v (on the dating of this letter see Chapter 6 n. 14). A letter of 30 January 1913 from National Gallery trustee R. H. Benson to director Sir Charles Holroyd repeats Layard’s account, thus “disposing of the famous [*sic*] that [Layard] bought [the picture] in Constantinople”; NGA, 14/3/1.
- 2 Layard to Morelli, 24 October 1865; the letter is more matter-of-fact, but the scene is nevertheless evocative.
- 3 The official designation was still Constantinople. On the city’s variable nomenclature and my preferred terminology, see Chapter 1, p. 6 and n. 12.
- 4 Maurice W. Brockwell, “The Layard Collection,” *Morning Post*, 4 November 1912.
- 5 *Ibid.*
- 6 Wolfgang Iser prefers the concept of “aesthetic response” over reception theory (too grounded in the text) and response theory (too grounded in the reader), in order to privilege the dialectical relationship between text and reader; see his *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Responses* (Baltimore, Md. and London, 1978), pp. ix–x. See also Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, T. Bahti (trans.) (Minneapolis, Minn., 1982), and the excellent analysis of Jauss as applied to nineteenth-century British takes on ancient Assyria in Frederick N. Bohrer, *Orientalism and Visual Culture: Imagining Mesopotamia in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, 2003), chapter 1.
- 7 Especially relevant for using “entanglement” as a guiding methodology is Roberts, *Istanbul Exchanges*.
- 8 His scholarly comments on Gentile’s portrait were more profuse; see Chapter 6, pp. 90–3.
- 9 With regard to the serendipity that landed Layard in the Middle East, Arnold C. Brackman wrote, “He set sail, but instead of a journey to Ceylon, Austen Henry

- Layard embarked on a journey into history,” in his *The Luck of Nineveh: Archaeology’s Great Adventure* (New York, 1978), p. 36.
- 10 Sir Austen Henry Layard, *Autobiography and Letters from His Childhood until His Appointment as H.M. Ambassador at Madrid*, W. N. Bruce (ed.), vol. 1 (New York, 1903), chapter 1.
 - 11 *Ibid.*, pp. 24–7.
 - 12 Austen Henry Layard, *Early Adventures in Persia, Susiana, and Babylonia*, 2 vols (London, 1887); the image is a reproduction of an 1843 watercolor in the British Museum, museum number 1976,0925.9. Another portrait by Henry Wyndham Phillips and preserved in an 1850 mezzotint by Samuel Williams Reynolds shows a dashing young Layard in Albanian dress.
 - 13 Here again we face the conundrum of terminology introduced in Chapter 1. “Persia” is the historical term for modern Iran, and the territories of ancient Mesopotamia, surrounding the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, are largely those of modern Iraq, Turkey, and Syria; in Layard’s day, control of these areas was split between the Persians and the Ottomans.
 - 14 This understanding of many non-Western cultures was codified in anthropologic study as the “ethnographic present,” a rhetorical mode that seems to deny change over time, change being considered essential to modernity; see Kirsten Hastrup, “The ethnographic present: A reinvention,” *Cultural Anthropology*, 5/1 (February 1990), pp. 45–61.
 - 15 Layard, *Nineveh and Its Remains*, vol. 1, pp. ix–x.
 - 16 *Ibid.*, p. 137.
 - 17 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York, 1978). Said’s work is of monumental influence and thus has also come under extensive criticism, particularly for an oversimplified binary. Taken in a thicket of interpretation and used for “contrapunctual” readings, however, it offers a highly useful frame of reference. See Roberts, *Istanbul Exchanges*, chapter 1, especially pp. 14–15.
 - 18 Zainab Bahrani, Zeynep Çelik, and Edhem Eldem (eds), *Scramble for the Past: A Story of Archaeology in the Ottoman Empire, 1753–1914* (Istanbul, 2011).
 - 19 Today, this is British Museum, museum number 118872 (see Figure 5.5). See Shawn Malley, “Shipping the bull: Staging Assyria in the British Museum,” *Nineteenth-Century Contexts: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 26/1 (March 2004), pp. 1–27.
 - 20 Bohrer, *Orientalism and Visual Culture*.
 - 21 Although in the same paragraph he terms the art elegant and truthful; Austen Henry Layard, “The Nineveh Court in the Crystal Palace,” in Owen Jones (ed.), *The Fine-Arts’ Courts in the Crystal Palace: First Series: North-West Side*, pt 6 (London, 1854), p. 12.
 - 22 Layard, *Nineveh and Its Remains*, vol. 1, p. xxv.

- 23 See Bohrer, *Orientalism and Visual Culture*, pp. 1–9, who builds on Freudian theory.
- 24 Layard, *Nineveh and Its Remains*, vol. 1, p. 101.
- 25 Judy Rudoë, “Lady Layard’s jewellery and the ‘Assyrian Style’ in nineteenth-century jewellery design,” in F. M. Fales and B. J. Hickey (eds), *Austen Henry Layard tra l’Oriente e Venezia* (Rome, 1983), p. 213.
- 26 Cesare Augusto Levi, *Le Collezioni veneziane d’arte e d’antichità dal secolo XIV, ai nostri giorni* (Venice, 1900), p. ccxli.
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 Henri de Régnier, *La vie vénitienne* (Paris, 1963), p. 76.
- 29 Letter from Christopher Lorimer, 18 February 1980; NGA, Sir Henry Austen Layard, National Gallery Information file.
- 30 Layard, *Autobiography and Letters*, vol. 1, p. vii.
- 31 Layard, *Early Adventures*, vol. 2, p. 427.
- 32 Lady Layard, *Journals*, 15 May 1877, BL, Add MS 46156, ff. 9r–v.
- 33 Ibid., 18 February 1879, f. 132 r.
- 34 Ibid., 11 June 1878, f. 83v.
- 35 That is, of Mehmed II; *ibid.*, 12 June 1877, f. 16r.
- 36 Ibid., 20 July 1878, f. 92r.
- 37 This set of 171 plates illustrated many of the sites and artifacts described in *Nineveh and Its Remains*; see Austen Henry Layard, *The Monuments of Nineveh from Drawings Made on the Spot* [. . .] *Illustrated in One Hundred Plates*, 1st series (London, 1849), and *A Second Series of the Monuments of Nineveh: Including Bas-Reliefs from the Palace of Sennacherib and Bronzes from the Ruins of Nimroud*, 2nd series (London, 1853).
- 38 The use of plaster casts in place of original objects was commonplace in nineteenth-century museums, which sought to teach the history of art through comprehensive displays of exemplary objects.
- 39 Edward McDermott, *Routledge’s Guide to the Crystal Palace and Park at Sydenham* (London, 1854), pp. 69–70.
- 40 Layard, “The Nineveh Court,” p. 10.
- 41 See, for example, on the immediate decay of gypsum sculpture in Layard, *Monuments of Nineveh*, 1st series, p. 14.
- 42 “Colorism” may also be a nod to what was considered the outré aesthetic of the Assyrians, who painted their monuments in lively hues, still evident to nineteenth-century excavators but also quickly lost to the elements. At this date, the fact that ancient Greek sculpture had also been brightly painted was not widely known, although Layard and other experts were aware of it. Rather, the imagined purity of classical forms, all creamy marble and subtle tonalities, was another baseline that pushed the arts of Mesopotamia into the realm of the strange.

- 43 See Chapter 1, pp. 12–13. The debate over the safety and protection of monuments inside and outside of museums brings to mind the case of the Elgin Marbles, and is further considered in Chapter 7.
- 44 For reasons of condition, the commander is cropped out of this detail, but he presides from a shaded, wheeled cart at top left of the full image.
- 45 Reminiscent of recent declarations by ISIS, the text states that, although they were drawn to this sculpture, the Arabs believed it was the work of “infidel giants” and associated it with the idols that Noah “cursed before the flood”; Layard, *Nineveh and Its Remains*, pp. 66–7.
- 46 On the roots of Islamophobia in Orientalism, see Ali Murat Yel and Alparslan Nas, “Insight Islamophobia: Governing the public visibility of Islamic lifestyle in Turkey,” *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 17/5 (2014), p. 568.

Chapter 6

- 1 BL, Layard Papers, Correspondence of Sir A. H. Layard with G. Morelli, Add MS 38966, f. 48v (1 March 1866).
- 2 Contrary to established scholarship and also relevant to the history of its conservation, I believe Layard took the Sultan portrait directly with him from Venice upon its purchase, and that it was in London by 1 January 1866. The dating of Layard’s letters preserved in the British Library, including a note to Morelli of 1 February 1866 reporting that he had sent the picture to the London-based Raffaello Pinti for restoration, supports this chronology; *ibid.*, ff. 36v–49r. See below, Chapter 6 n. 18. Some fifty years later, in hearings pertaining to the Sultan canvas, former National Gallery director Edward Poynter claimed to have seen the picture in Layard’s home in London around 1867; see Chapter 7 n. 40.
- 3 As is frequently the case in the realm of connoisseurship, some of these have since been reattributed or given to followers or workshops of the named master.
- 4 Jaynie Anderson, “Layard and Morelli,” in F. M. Fales and B. J. Hickey (eds), *Austen Henry Layard tra l’Oriente e Venezia* (Rome, 1983), pp. 109–37.
- 5 Carlo Ginzburg, “Morelli, Freud, and Sherlock Holmes: Clues and scientific method,” in U. Eco and T. A. Sebeok (eds), *The Sign of Three: Dupin, Holmes, Peirce* (Bloomington, Ind., 1984), pp. 81–118.
- 6 The letter, originally in French, is cited in Anderson, “Layard and Morelli,” p. 121.
- 7 *Ibid.*; Susanna Avery-Quash, “The art of conservation II: Sir Charles Eastlake and conservation at the National Gallery, London,” *Burlington Magazine*, 157 (2015), pp. 846–54; and Wendy Partridge, “Philosophies and tastes in nineteenth-century painting conservation,” in M. Marincola (ed.), *Studying and Conserving*

- Painting: Occasional Papers on the Samuel H. Kress Collection* (London, 2006), pp. 19–29.
- 8 A helpful introduction to the history and theory of conservation, focused on the National Gallery's collection, is David Bomford, *A Closer Look: Conservation of Paintings*, 2nd ed., updated by Jill Dunkerton and Martin Wyld (London, 2009).
 - 9 Layard and Morelli were both leery of the restorations undertaken by many Italian museums and churches, so much so that Morelli advised studying drawings rather than paintings to gain a sense of a master's hand because, being of lesser value, they were less apt to have been altered; see Layard's "Introduction" to Franz Theodor Kugler, *Handbook of Painting: The Italian Schools*, 6th ed., A. H. Layard (ed.) (London, 1891), pp. xxi–xxiii.
 - 10 This critic, a Sicilian named Cavallari, is cited in Adolfo Venturi, "La formazione della Galleria Layard a Venezia," *L'Arte*, 15 (1912), p. 449.
 - 11 Anderson, "Layard and Morelli," pp. 114–15.
 - 12 Morelli to Layard in a letter of 21 October 1865, as cited and translated in *ibid.*, p. 115.
 - 13 Crookham, "Art or document?" pp. 30–1.
 - 14 These comments are found in letters dating 24 October 1865, 1 February 1866, and 1 March 1866; BL, Add MS 38966, ff. 36v–37r, 47r, 48v. Oddly, the letter of 24 October appears to have been misdated as 1864 by Layard himself. It is a critical error but all signs, including the sequence of his correspondence, support an 1865 dating. Perhaps we are catching a glimpse of a giddy Layard, overwhelmed by the thrill of his purchase.
 - 15 Kugler, *Handbook of Painting*, 6th ed., p. 305. This edition was "thoroughly revised and in part rewritten" by Austen Henry Layard.
 - 16 BL, Add MS 38966, f. 48v (1 March 1866).
 - 17 Comparing the two editions: J. A. Crowe and G. B. Cavalcaselle, *A History of Painting in North Italy*, vol. 1 (London, 1871), p. 127, and vol. 1 (London, 1912), p. 128; see Anderson, "Layard and Morelli," p. 133 n. 68.
 - 18 See above, Chapter 6 n. 2. Scholars have passed on the received wisdom that the conservator was Molteni, but the likely date of the picture's export to London, Layard's letters, and his autograph catalog (NGA, NG7/292/13ii) indicate otherwise. Crookham concurs, in "Art or document?" p. 9.
 - 19 See the letters of 24 October 1865 (above, Chapter 6 n. 14), 1 February 1866, and 1 March 1866; BL, Add MS 38966, ff. 36v, 47r, 48v.
 - 20 NGA, NG10/12, National Gallery Manuscript Catalogue (1951), where the reliner is given as G. Morill, a frequent collaborator of Raffaele Pinti, also named here.
 - 21 Written correspondence from the Gallery's Curatorial Department, 10 August 1998, and via email on 23 April 2019. At one point it was thought that Gentile's image might have been transferred from wood to canvas, once a common practice, but this is no longer held to be the case.

- 22 Like most, he gives the restoration to Molteni; Bomford, *A Closer Look*, p. 61.
- 23 Campbell and Chong (eds), *Bellini and the East*, p. 78.
- 24 Letter to Louis Thuasne, 13 July 1887, reproduced in Parliamentary Archives (PA), Appeal Cases: HL/PO/JU/4/3/660, series 3, 1917, L–M, 30–2, p. 78. On the inscription, see Chapter 3 n. 50.
- 25 Crowe and Cavalcaselle, *History of Painting*, vol. 1 (1871 ed.), p. 126.
- 26 Martin Davies, *The Earlier Italian Schools*, 2nd rev. ed. (London, 1961), pp. 51–2; see also Chapter 8, p. 127.
- 27 See: <http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/gentile-bellini-the-sultan-mehmet-ii> (accessed 25 November 2018). This attribution was not challenged in either of two recent exhibitions at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston, Mass. (2005–6), and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (2007).
- 28 On the seven known restorations of Titian's Pesaro Altarpiece, among other works, he wrote, "the little that may have remained of the original picture soon disappears altogether"; Layard in Kugler, *Handbook of Painting*, 6th ed., pp. xxi–xxii.
- 29 I am indebted in this thinking to Noémie Etienne, "Does conservation challenge art history?" Lecture, Johns Hopkins University, 6 April 2015.
- 30 On this shift in attitude toward sculpture from the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries, see Orietta Rossi Pinelli, "From the need for completion to the cult of the fragment: How tastes, scholarship, and museum curators' choices changed our view of ancient sculpture," in J. B. Grossman, J. Podany, and M. True (eds), *History of Restoration of Ancient Stone Sculptures* (Los Angeles, Calif., 2001), pp. 61–74.
- 31 Until recently, the physical history of objects was largely discounted in art historical interpretation, a fact apparent in the relatively few sustained collaborations with conservators. The so-called material turn in art history is directing more attention to these matters, although scholarship on painting has been the least impacted by such interests to date. An excellent set of related studies conducted through the lens of making is Pamela H. Smith, Amy R.W. Meyers, and Harold J. Cook (eds), *Ways of Making and Knowing: The Material Culture of Empirical Knowledge* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 2014).
- 32 On such violence in general, see David Freedberg, "Idolatry and iconoclasm," in his *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago, Ill., 1989), chapter 14, pp. 378–428. With regard to Islam, see Elias, *Aisha's Cushion*, and with special attention to politics, Finbarr Barry Flood, "Between cult and culture: Bamiyan, Islamic iconoclasm, and the museum," *Art Bulletin*, 84/4 (December 2002), pp. 641–59; in the Christian context, see Belting, *Likeness and Presence*. See also Chapter 3, pp. 39–41.
- 33 Cevizli, "Bellini, bronze and bombards," p. 754, although, according to Jill Dunkerton of the National Gallery, the damage to the canvas is rather uniform and not particularly remarkable for a work of that date; email correspondence, 23 April 2019.

- 34 This society, established in 1848, was dedicated to Italian art. The Pre-Raphaelite painter Dante Gabriel Rossetti credited Layard's sketches, along with those of his frequent travel and sketching companion "Mrs. Higford Burt," with giving the British their "first real chance of forming a congruous idea of early art without going [Italy]"; see Anderson, "Layard and Morelli," p. 112–13.
- 35 The later edition introduced Veronese, Paduan, Ferrarese, Bolognese, and Lombard schools, for example. Compare Kugler, *Handbook of Painting*, 6th ed., Layard (ed.) (see above, Chapter 6 n. 15) with the 4th ed., "revised and remodeled from the latest researches" by Lady Eastlake (London, 1874). On the importance of Morelli, see the 6th ed., pp. xv–xx.
- 36 The text acknowledges the picture to be in the collection of the editor but goes no further toward what we would today consider due accountability.
- 37 Compare the text in Kugler, *Handbook of Painting*, 6th ed., p. 304, with the 4th ed., p. 324.
- 38 Layard sometimes offered an alternative provenance reaching back to the Venturi family in the eighteenth century; see "Original Mss Catalogue of Sir Henry Layard Collection of Pictures," NGA, NG7/292/13(ii). On the Zen, see Chapter 4, pp. 52–4.
- 39 *Catalogue of the Late Lord Northwick's Extensive and Magnificent Collection of Ancient and Modern Pictures* [...] at Thirlestane House, Cheltenham (London, 1859), p. 137.
- 40 "Le tavole ricordate dal Ridolfi sono in parte perdute ed in parte recate altrove, come il ritratto di Maometto II, che era in casa Zenò, e che fu tradotto nel 1825 in Inghilterra"; Francesco Zanotto, *Pinacoteca della I.R. Accademia Veneta delle Belle Arti*, vol. 1 (Venice, 1830), n.p. See above Chapter 4, p. 52.
- 41 Cem's story, including his rivalry with his half-brother, Bayezid II, and his role as a pawn between the Ottomans and various European powers, could fill another book. As for the painting, it nearly matches Gentile's Sultan portrait in scale and bears the artist's name at upper right, but the photograph makes this attribution doubtful. See *Catalogue of Important Pictures by Old Masters c. 1400–c. 1600 from the Northwick Park Collection, the Property of the Late Captain E.G. Spencer-Churchill* (London, 1965), pp. 30–1.
- 42 Sotheby's, *Arts of the Islamic World Including Fine Carpets and Textiles*, Auction Results, 24 October 1997, Lot 267, available at: <http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2007/arts-of-the-islamic-world-including-fine-carpets-and-textiles-l07222/lot.267.html> (accessed 14 November 2018). Sotheby's traces this picture back as far as a 1931 London auction. On this and one other related double portrait, also considered an early copy and recently sold at auction, see Uzun, "Three Italian portraits." That this copy is on panel could suggest that wood was the original support for Gentile's picture as well; see above, Chapter 2 n. 51.
- 43 NGA, NG7/292/13(ii); the frame is mentioned in Layard's personal catalog, but no other records of it survive at the National Gallery.

- 44 Rebecca Zorach and Elizabeth Rodini (eds), *Paper Museums: The Reproductive Print in Europe, c. 1500–1800* (Chicago, Ill., 2005).
- 45 A handwritten note of February 1914 states: “the NGB [National Gallery Board] possess no photos of the Layard Collection”; NGA, NG14/3/2.
- 46 See Chapter 6 n. 19.
- 47 Lady Layard was less than complimentary of the family’s art collection, namely, “the (very bad) oil pictures of the different members of the family amongst which was Sultan Abdul Hamid’s daughter.” See Lady Layard, *Journals*, 6 January and 7 [sic] February 1912, BL, Add MS 46170, ff. 178r–v and 193v.
- 48 Aloïss Hess, *Les Médailleurs de la Renaissance, avec 11 phototypographies inalterables et 100 vignettes*, vol. 5 (Paris, 1885); and Louis Thuasne, *Gentile Bellini et Sultan Mohammed II: Notes sur le séjour du peintre vénitien à Constantinople (1479–80)* (Paris, 1888).
- 49 PA, Appeal Cases, pp. 66–80.
- 50 Roberts discusses a self-portrait by Zonaro that, depicting himself in a fez and adorned with the medals presented him by the Sultan, echoes Gentile’s self-presentation upon his return to Venice; see her *Istanbul Exchanges*, p. 141.
- 51 Angelo De Gubernatis, *Despatches from Greco-Latin Civilization*, cited in Fausto Zonaro, *Twenty Years under the Reign of Abdülhamid: The Memoirs and Works of Fausto Zonaro*, E. Makzume and C. M. Trevigne (eds) (Istanbul, 2011), p. 185.
- 52 Also called the “Young Turk Revolution,” this uprising took away Abdülhamid’s autocratic powers by restoring the Ottoman constitution that had briefly been instituted in 1876, early in his reign.
- 53 Zonaro, *Twenty Years*, p. 234.
- 54 Ibid.
- 55 Ibid., p. 231.
- 56 Ibid., p. 259.
- 57 Ibid., p. 204.
- 58 The Layards were happy to share photographs of their collection; see Chapter 6, p. 93.
- 59 Copies, he later wrote, “did not actually need my imaginative powers”; Zonaro, *Twenty Years*, p. 73.
- 60 Lady Layard was asked to provide a copy of her portrait for this undertaking, according to Aldo Ravà; see Chapter 7, p. 102. On the use of museums in constructing modern Turkish identity, see Wendy M. K. Shaw, *Possessors and Possessed: Museums, Archaeology, and the Visualization of History in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Berkeley, Calif., 2003).
- 61 Osman Öndeş and Erol Makzume, *Fausto Zonaro: Ottoman Court Painter* (Istanbul, 2003), p. 140.

Chapter 7

- 1 NGA, Minutes of the Board of Trustees, NG1/8, f. 131 (11 March 1913).
- 2 “We have just heard from the F.O. [Foreign Office] that the Layard Pictures have arrived at the Embassy at Rome”; the news, breathlessly summed up in one sentence, was penned on a Treasury Chambers notecard; NGA, NG/14/3/3 (10 April 1915).
- 3 NGA, NG7/435 (12 December 1914).
- 4 NGA, NG8/123 (31 January 1913). Rodd also called the painting the “Lares and Penates” of Venice, comparing it to the protective deities of ancient Rome and sympathizing with local claims to it; NGA, NG7/454 (8 August 1914).
- 5 One notable aspect of the Marbles is that they are architectural ornaments, intended for display on a structure that still stands, and were not intended as portable goods; many consider this a strong argument that they belong on or near that original site. The bibliography on the Marbles is extensive; for a concise introduction, see Kate Fitz Gibbon, “The Elgin Marbles: A summary,” in her *Who Owns the Past? Cultural Policy, Cultural Property, and the Law* (New Brunswick, N.J., 2006), pp. 109–21.
- 6 Recounted in Roberto Balzani, *Per le antichità e le belle arti: La legge n. 364 del 20 giugno 1909 e l’Italia giolittiana*, Collana dei dibattiti storici in Parlamento, vol. 2 (Bologna, 2003), p. 29.
- 7 *Leicester Chronicle*, 9 November 1912, available at: www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk (accessed 13 July 2018).
- 8 *Daily Herald*, 4 December 1912, *ibid.*
- 9 *Pall Mall Gazette*, 4 November 1912, *ibid.*
- 10 *Ibid.*
- 11 Lady Layard, *Journals*, 16 July 1903, BL, Add MS 46167.
- 12 Ravà, “Una proposta,” p. 1. I have found no reference to this commission in Lady Layard’s diaries.
- 13 Angelo Conti, “La Galleria Layard,” *Il Marzocco*, anno xvii, no. 45, 10 November 1912, p. 1.
- 14 Ravà, “Una proposta.”
- 15 In Italian, the “Conservazione dei monumenti e degli oggetti di antichità e d’arte.” On the limits of what was allowed, based on pressure from politicians focused on protecting private property rights, see Virginia Stampete, “Tutela del paesaggio: Dai singoli stati italiani alla legge Croce sul patrimonio artistico,” *InStoria: Rivista Online di Storia e Informazione* no. 54, June 2012 (85) (accessed 5 August 2016).
- 16 Ministero della Istruzione Pubblica, “Catalogo degli oggetti di sommo pregio per la storia o per l’arte, appartenenti a privati, pubblicato a termini dell’art. 1 della legge 27 giugno 1903, n. 242,” in *Gazzetta Ufficiale del Regno d’Italia*, n. 307, 31 December 1903, pp. 5678–86.

- 17 Francesco Sissini, *Alla festa di Olimpia: Storia del bello, dell'arte e della tutela del patrimonio culturale e ambientale* (Florence, 2001), pp. 94–9. For a general history, see also Andrea Emiliani (ed.), *Leggi, bandi e provvedimenti per la tutela dei beni artistici e culturali negli antichi stati italiani, 1571–1860* (Bologna, 1996).
- 18 “Se tra i nuovi popoli l’arte è un lusso, in Italia essa è il fiore della nostra anima nazionale, che vibra perennemente da trenta secoli”; editorial of 1903 in the *Giornale d’Italia*, as cited in Balzani, *Antichità e le belle arti*, p. 22.
- 19 *Ibid.*, pp. 20–2.
- 20 *The Sphere*, 21 April 1916, available at: www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk (accessed 10 July 2018).
- 21 Horatio Brown was an English historian resident in Venice and a friend of the Layards. NGA, NG1/8/131 (11 March 1913).
- 22 See the ever-wordy Layard’s lengthy introduction to Giovanni Morelli [Ivan Lermolieff], *Italian Painters: Critical Study of Their Works*, J. Ffoulkes (trans.) (London, 1892), pp. 13–14. On Morelli/Lermolieff, see Chapter 6, p. 84.
- 23 Letter from the private archive of the Antinori family, Florence, quoted in Anderson, “Layard and Morelli,” p. 117.
- 24 Unpublished letter, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 119.
- 25 *Ibid.*, pp. 120–3.
- 26 *Ibid.*, pp. 114–5 and 122.
- 27 Brockwell, “The Layard Collection.”
- 28 Margaret Doody, *Tropic of Venice* (Philadelphia, Pa., 2007), pp. 36–7.
- 29 *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 3 December 1917, available at: www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk (accessed 9 July 2018).
- 30 See the summary of debates around the law in Balzani, *Antichità e le belle arti*, chapter 9.
- 31 This is well summarized in Stampete, “Tutela del paesaggio.”
- 32 The literature on this topic is extensive and growing, touching on questions of history, law, and ethics. A strong introduction to these matters is Derek Gillman, *The Idea of Cultural Heritage*, rev. ed. (Cambridge, 2010).
- 33 Salvatore Settis, *Italia S.p.A: Lassalto al patrimonio culturale* (Turin, 2007), chapter 5. This concept dates to the interwar period.
- 34 For two contemporary perspectives on these matters, see James Cuno, *Who Owns Antiquity? Museums and the Battle over Our Ancient Heritage* (Princeton, N.J., 2008), and Kwame Anthony Appiah, “Whose culture is it anyway?” in his *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (London, 2006), chapter 8, pp. 115–35.
- 35 Aldo Ravà, arguing for added protectionism in the 1909 law, advocated a “strong guarantee that the State can impede [...] from crossing our nation’s borders works significant for art or history, which confirm today and across the centuries the genius and greatness of our people”; cited in Balzani, *Antichità e le belle arti*, p. 108.

- 36 *Atti del Parlamento Italiano, Camera dei Deputati, Sessione 1904–1906, Discussioni*, vol. 7, 2–16 May 1906 (Rome, 1906), p. 7629. Available at: https://books.google.com/books?id=ei1RAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA7629&lpg=PA7629&dq=Gazzetta+Ufficiale+31+Dicembre+1903+sommo+pregio&source=bl&ots=1vkTRdv6XL&sig=TxQXRbsFzbYs2Amyj1Df562Tojc&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjW76a74rLOAhWD24MKHW8_BAEQ6AEIHDAA#v=onepage&q=Gazzetta%20Ufficiale%2031%20Dicembre%201903%20sommo%20pregio&f=false (accessed 5 August 2016). *Tutela*, translated here as “safeguarding,” implies an active form of care that involves conservation, restoration, and legal oversight.
- 37 Luigi Rava (not to be confused with Aldo Ravà) was a lawyer and politician who took an early interest in the preservation of natural heritage, starting with L. 411 of 1905 that protected the famous Pines of Ravenna, an ancient forest near his hometown.
- 38 Lady Layard, *Journals*, 1 January 1909, BL, Add MS 46170.
- 39 Balzani, *Antichità e le belle arti*, pp. 65–6. In this framework, the owner of an item declared to be “of interest” must somehow become aware of that interest and then notify the state of an intention to export the work. The state, in turn, may decide to purchase the item, allow its export (subject to a progressive tax), or do neither, returning it to the owner.
- 40 Italians sought proof the paintings had been out before 1902, and the Gallery was able to offer several pieces of evidence, including a pamphlet on the “Collection of Pictures Belonging to the Right Hon. Austen H. Layard, Lent for Exhibition to the South Kensington Museum, 1869” (where Gentile’s *Sultan* is entry 32), and the statement of former Gallery director Sir Edward Poynter, who “testif[ied] to the fact that he viewed Sir Henry Layard’s collection of pictures in his house in London about the year 1867 and there saw the portrait of the Sultan Mohamed II”; NGA, NG7/292/13 and NG7/435/16(i).
- 41 *The Scotsman*, 24 February 1915, available at: www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk (accessed 11 July 2018).
- 42 NGA, NG14/3/3 and 4.
- 43 NGA, NG14/3/4.
- 44 *Pall Mall Gazette*, 14 November 1912. The author is comparing the recovery of the portrait with that of Napoleon’s recently rediscovered compass, both seen as traces of imperial ambition.

Chapter 8

- 1 As a matter of intense concern to the National Gallery, Layard’s will is frequently cited in its archives (NGA); this citation is from NGA, NG/14/3 (Layard Papers).

- 2 *Pall Mall Gazette*, 17 April 1916, p. 5.
- 3 NGA, NG7/422/2.
- 4 The portraits at issue included two attributed to Gentile Bellini, the second representing Doge Niccolò Marcello. The remainder were given to Moretto da Brescia, Giovanni Battista Moroni, Rosalba Carriera, and other lesser-known or anonymous painters. Many attributions, and even the exact number of historical portraits at issue (14, 15, or 16), are still open to discussion.
- 5 NGA, NG1/8/123.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 125.
- 7 NGA, NG1/8/134.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 131.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 149–67.
- 10 NGA, NG7/436/1914.
- 11 NGA, Minutes of the Board of Trustees, NG1/8, ff. 166–7 (27 January 1914).
- 12 PA, Appeal Cases: HL/PO/JU/4/3/660, series 3, 1917, L–M, 30–2, pp. 94–100. Unlike Sargant, Graves was testifying on behalf of Major Layard, and the overlap in their opinions—both ultimately supporting his claim—underscores the difficult terrain the National Gallery needed to negotiate.
- 13 Brown, *Venetian Narrative Painting*, especially pp. 215–19 with regard to witnessing; see Chapter 3, pp. 46–7, and Plate 3.
- 14 Roberts, on behalf of Major Layard; PA, Appeal Cases, p. 80.
- 15 Henri Zerner, “L’effect de ressemblance,” in A. Gentile, P. Morl, and C. C. Via (eds), *Il Ritratto e la memoria*, materiali 3 (Rome, 1993), pp. 111–21.
- 16 See Wilson, *World in Venice*.
- 17 Brilliant, *Portraiture*, pp. 54–8.
- 18 NGA, NG14/3/6; Thuasne, *Gentile Bellini*.
- 19 NGA, NG7/292/13 (ix and x); the envelope and catalog are NGA, NG7/292/13 (i and ii).
- 20 The team consisted of John Simon, Stanley O. Buckmaster, and J. Austen-Cartmell. Their opinion in the case of *Layard v. Bessborough* was dated 2 December 1914 and filed with the Gallery twelve days later; NGA, NG 7/460/1914. Lord Bessborough was the surviving executor and trustee of Austen Henry Layard’s will.
- 21 NGA, NG14/3/1 (Layard Court Case).
- 22 *Ibid.* (see the letters of February to April 1917).
- 23 NGA, NG1/8/123.
- 24 Cited in Crookham, “Art or document?” pp. 33–4.
- 25 *Ibid.*
- 26 On the other hand, Svetlana Alpers argues for a “museum effect” that impacts how we look at all sorts of objects—from giant crabs to high art—in museums; see her “The museum as a way of seeing,” in I. Karp and S. D. Lavine (eds), *Exhibiting*

- Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (Washington, D. C. and London, 1991), pp. 25–32.
- 27 I was unable to find historic label copy for the portrait, but Crookham analyzes its treatment in and absence from various National Gallery collection catalogs, thus providing a useful overview of its changing reputation and interpretation; see his “Art or document?” pp. 35–6.
- 28 Available at: <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/> and <https://www.npg.org.uk/about/> (accessed 16 May 2018).
- 29 Brockwell, “The Layard collection.”
- 30 As suggested also in Crookham, “Art or Document?” p. 34.
- 31 See Brockwell, “The Layard collection”; “Layard collection,” *The Illustrated London News*, 9 November 1912; *The Globe*, 2 November 1912; and the *Pall Mall Gazette*, 5 November 1912.
- 32 “Museum value” was a term used by Claude Phillips, “Famous Collection for the National Gallery: The Layard Bequest,” *Daily Telegraph*, 4 November 1912, as cited and discussed in Crookham, “Art or Document?” pp. 32–3.
- 33 Trenchard Cox, *The National Gallery: A Room to Room Guide* (London, 1930), pp. 76–7.
- 34 W. Loftus Hare, “The portrait of Muhammad II by Gentile Bellini,” *Apollo*, 20/119 (1 November 1934), pp. 249–50.
- 35 Chapter 1, pp. 7–8.
- 36 This history is recounted in Crookham, “Art or Document?” pp. 35–6.
- 37 Davies, *The Earlier Italian Schools*, p. 51.
- 38 The letters, from the summer of 1961, are in NGA, Dossier 3099; the article is Franz Babinger, “Un ritratto ignorato di Maometto II, opera di Gentile Bellini,” *Arte Veneta*, 15 (1961), pp. 25–32, which discusses the double portrait mentioned in Chapter 6 n. 42.
- 39 Meyer zur Capellen, *Gentile Bellini*, pp. 128–9.
- 40 Crookham, “Art or document?” p. 37.
- 41 It was lent eleven times between 1989 and 2013; see *ibid.* and Chapter 9, p. 133.
- 42 Jeffrey A. Auerbach, *The Great Exhibition of 1851: A Nation on Display* (New Haven, Conn., 1999).
- 43 Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London, 1995), pp. 70–1.

Chapter 9

- 1 Representing just a handful of similar headlines, these are from, respectively, *Radikal*, 13 December 1999; *Posta*, 15 December 1999; and *Milliyet*, 3 December 1999.

- 2 Steven Kinzer, "Istanbul journal: 500-year-old painting helps Turks look ahead," *The New York Times*, 25 December 1999.
- 3 On the place of imagery in contemporary society, see Christiane Gruber and Sune Haugbolle (eds), *Visual Culture in the Modern Middle East: Rhetoric of the Image* (Bloomington, Ind., 2013).
- 4 NGA, S4590; Rifat passed away in 2007.
- 5 Meeting with Günsel Renda, Istanbul, 27 September 2018.
- 6 NGA, S4590.
- 7 *Türkiye*, 14 January 2000.
- 8 Orhan Pamuk, "Bellini and the East," in his *Other Colors: Essays and a Story*, M. Freely (trans.) (New York, 2007), p. 320. Pamuk's first love was drawing and painting, and he explores art making at the Ottoman court in his novel *My Name is Red*, E. Göknar (trans.) (New York, 2001).
- 9 See, in particular, Orhan Pamuk, *Istanbul: Memories and the City*, M. Freely (trans.) (New York, 2004).
- 10 Fatih Sultan Mehmet Bridge, one of three crossing the Bosphorus, is fittingly named because it connects Asia to Europe. On Mehmed's presence on the cityscape and in the popular and historical imagination, see Brockett, "When the Ottomans became Turks." On the spelling of Mehmed/Mehmet, see Chapter 9 n. 24.
- 11 G. Renda meeting, 27 September 2018.
- 12 NGA, S4590.
- 13 Pamuk, "Bellini and the East," p. 314.
- 14 Salim and Sevinç Koçak, *Fatih Sultan Mehmed Nasıl Büyük İnsan Oldu?* (Istanbul, 2017).
- 15 Modern examples can be found on the website of the Ministry of National Education, at: <http://img.eba.gov.tr> (accessed 23 October 2018), although the image has been used in this way for decades. I thank Miray Çakıroğlu for this reference and her watchful eyes in Istanbul.
- 16 For currency, see Banknoter, at: <http://banknoter.com/s/turkey> (accessed 12 October 2018). The stamp in question actually shows Zonaro's copy of Gentile's portrait (see Chapter 6, pp. 95–7).
- 17 Fort & Manlé Parfum, at: <https://fortandmanle.com/products/fatih-sultan-mehmet>. The original label for the 30 ml bottle featured the full color portrait. See Art and Olfaction awards for 2017, at: <http://www.artandolfactionawards.org/fatih-sultan-mehmed-artisan-2017/> (accessed 25 October 2018).
- 18 I am deeply grateful to Güneş Özge for acting as my linguistic and cultural interpreter during my 2018 stay in Istanbul.
- 19 My online survey via SurveyMonkey during the summer of 2018 received responses from 101 people, and I interviewed approximately 40 in Istanbul that September. All respondents were asked to provide basic identifying

- information. I assess level of education roughly, by profession and apparent proficiency in English.
- 20 Özge Samancı, *Dare to Disappoint: Growing Up in Turkey* (New York, 2015), p. 131, and by phone, 22 July 2018; Samancı is now on the faculty at Northwestern University.
- 21 These and many similar phrases were given by respondents to my online survey. People on the ground did not express such views, either because they felt uncomfortable doing so or, I suspect, because they did not share them.
- 22 See: <https://www.facebook.com/Outrageous-Ottoman-Memes-780580212031710/>; <https://me.me/i/wtf-fun-fact-2-dracula-is-based-on-vlad-the-13413023>; and https://www.reddit.com/r/HistoryMemes/comments/8ljzkm/mehmed_ii_im_not_like_constantine_at_all_some/ (accessed 15 October 2018).
- 23 Respectively, Drake, Europa Universalis IV, and Thanos from the *Avengers* series (all accessed 23 October 2018).
- 24 See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mehmed_the_Conqueror, and <https://www.facebook.com/hazretifatih> (accessed 23 October 2018). Note that the modern Turkish spelling of this popular Arabic name (in English, Muhammad) is Mehmet, in contrast to the preferred scholarly transliteration of the Ottoman, Mehmed.
- 25 The ancient Greek poet Hesiod was the first to write longingly for a lost Golden Age; see *Works and Days, Theogony and the Shield of Heracles*, H. G. Evelyn-White (trans.) (Mineola, N.Y., 2006). On nostalgia in the modern era, see Pierre Nora, “Between memory and history: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*,” *Representations*, 26 (Spring 1989), pp. 7–24, and David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge, 1985).
- 26 Hakan Övünç Ongur, “Identifying Ottomanisms: The discursive evolution of Ottoman pasts in Turkish presents,” *Middle Eastern Studies*, 51/3 (2015), p. 423. Another excellent resource is Stephen Kinzer, *Crescent and Star: Turkey between Two Worlds*, 2nd rev. ed. (New York, 2008).
- 27 Kinzer, *Crescent and Star*, chapter 3, pp. 57–82.
- 28 Reformers tended to oppose the veil as a foreign import rather than a religious problem, and its legislation was localized. The fez, on the other hand, was seen as an Ottoman symbol despite the fact that it was an “invented tradition,” having been imposed on male citizens in the mid-nineteenth century. See Hale Yilmaz, *Becoming Turkish: Nationalist Reforms and Cultural Negotiations in Early Republican Turkey, 1923–1945* (Syracuse, N.Y., 2013), chapters 1 and 2.
- 29 Brockett, “When the Ottomans became Turks,” pp. 409–12.
- 30 Critics suggest that Neo-Ottomanism is a soft term for what might better be called neo-imperialism, even mingled with Islamist sympathies; see Ongur, “Identifying Ottomanisms,” p. 425.
- 31 This control lasted as late as 1980; see Kinzer, *Crescent and Star*, pp. 165–9.

- 32 Ongur, “Identifying Ottomanisms,” p. 423.
- 33 Joost Lagendijk, “Turkey’s accession to the European Union and the role of the Justice and Development Party,” in A. T. Kuru and A. Stepan (eds), *Democracy, Islam, and Secularism in Turkey* (New York, 2012), pp. 166–206. The pace of political developments in Turkey is rapid, evolving even as this book goes to press—with rising signs of opposition to Erdoğan’s firm grip on power.
- 34 This figure is based on Şiblizade Ahmed’s portrait of Mehmed smelling a rose (Chapter 2, Figure 2.1), and accompanied by effigies of Sultan Süleyman I and his ingenious architect-engineer, Sinan.
- 35 Erdoğan visited the tomb on 30 May, the day after the usual festivities; see “Erdoğan opens renovated tomb of Mehmed the Conqueror,” *Daily Sabah*, 30 May 2018, available at: <https://www.dailysabah.com/istanbul/2018/05/30/erdogan-opens-renovated-tomb-of-mehmed-the-conqueror> (accessed 17 October 2018).
- 36 Alev Çınar, “National history as a contested site: The conquest of Istanbul and Islamist negotiations of the nation,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 43/2 (2001), pp. 364–91.
- 37 “Thousands mark the Conquest of Istanbul,” *TRT World Report*, 29 May 2016, available at: <https://www.trtworld.com/turkey/thousands-mark-the-conquest-of-istanbul-1574> (accessed 17 October 2018).
- 38 The 2012 film *Fetih (1453)* set a new record for Turkish box office revenues; Ongur, “Identifying Ottomanisms,” p. 428. The 2013 series *Fatih* folded after five episodes; see the trailer at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fVhy5O7maHM> (accessed 9 November 2018). The Turkish government has encouraged these productions but also pressured them to focus more on triumphal moments and less on salacious scenes of the harem and drinking that, as Erdoğan put it regarding the *Magnificent Century* series about Sultan Süleyman I, “ridicule the values of this nation”; Kumru Berfin Emre Çetin, “The ‘politicization’ of Turkish television dramas,” *International Journal of Communication*, 8 (2014), p. 2477.
- 39 Ongur adapts this term from Michael Billig’s notion of “banal nationalism,” and explores its many manifestations, including under the AKP; see “Identifying Ottomanisms,” pp. 425–9.
- 40 With some important exceptions, including recent debates about removing Andrew Jackson from the \$20 bill. The most recent presidential portrait, of Barack Obama, stirred up interest for the unconventional style and symbolism chosen by artist Kehinde Wiley to set his subject apart.
- 41 Erik-Jan Zürcher, “In the name of the father, the teacher, and the hero: The Atatürk personality cult in Turkey,” in V. Ibrahim and M. Wunch (eds), *Political Leadership, Nations, and Charisma* (Abingdon and New York, 2012), pp. 129–42. Zürcher asserts that the proliferation of imagery on the part of Atatürk and his followers was

“intended directly to challenge Islamic prescripts on representational images” (pp. 132–3).

- 42 There are many examples, and they seem to be becoming more frequent; among them, see Soner Çağaptay, *The New Sultan: Erdoğan and the Crisis of Modern Turkey* (London, 2017). *Reis* was the title of a failed 2017 propagandistic biopic about Erdoğan, released just before the critical election of the same year that brought him unprecedented power.
- 43 I was, however, encouraged in my engagement with this banner as an echo of Gentile’s portrait by an anonymous reviewer, I assume Turkish, who shared my impressions of the image.

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Plate 1 Gentile Bellini, *Portrait of Sultan Mehmed II*, 1480, oil on canvas, 69.9 x 52.1 cm. © The National Gallery, London. Layard Bequest, 1916. Currently on loan to the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



Plate 2 Master of the Vienna Passion (attributed), *El Gran Turco*, c. 1470, engraving with hand-coloring, Album H.2153, fol. 144r, Topkapı Palace Museum, Istanbul.



Plate 3 Gentile Bellini, *Procession in Piazza San Marco*, 1496, oil on canvas, Venice, Accademia Gallery, cat. 567. © Archivio fotografico G.A.VE, Ministero dei beni e delle attività culturali—Gallerie dell'Accademia di Venezia.



Plate 4 Nakkaş Osman, *Portrait of Sultan Mehmed II*, in S. Lokman, *Şema‘ilname*, 1579, TSMK. H.1563, fol. 43b, Topkapı Palace Museum, Istanbul.



Plate 5 Circle of Paolo Veronese, *Portrait of Sultan Mehmed II*, 1578 or later, oil on canvas, Munich, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, bpk Bildagentur / Staatsgalerie, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen / Art Resource, NY.



Plate 6 After James Fergusson, *The Palaces of Nimroud Restored*, color lithograph, in Austen Henry Layard, *The Monuments of Nineveh*, 2nd series (London, 1853), pl. 1. The New York Public Library, Digital Collections.



Plate 7 Assyrian Rock Sculpture (Bavian), in Austen Henry Layard, *The Monuments of Nineveh*, 2nd series (London, 1853), pl. 51. The New York Public Library, Digital Collections.



Plate 8 Fausto Zonaro, *Portrait of Sultan Mehmed II after Gentile Bellini*, 1907, oil on canvas, TSM 17/65, Topkapı Palace Museum, Istanbul. Currently on view at the Dolmabahçe Palace, Istanbul.